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WHAT HE COST HER.

BY

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"FALLEN FORTUNES," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.—VOL. III.

London:
CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY.
1877.
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CHARLES DICKENS AND EVANS,
CRYSTAL PALACE PRESS.

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WHAT HE COST HER.

CHAPTER I.

A COLLISION AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

The conversation in the *coupé*, which has occupied but a few pages in its recital, did in fact fill up, and very agreeably to both parties, the whole journey between London and Pullham Junction. Next to playing whist and reading fiction, there is nothing which makes time pass so quickly as making love; and though it would be unfair to accuse Cecil Landon of having quite gone to that length with his charming companion, he had certainly given the reins to his very respectable powers of pleasing.

Grantham was the first station upon the branch line to Middleton, which was Cecil's starting-point for Wellborough; so far only were

they now to travel together, and he unaffectedly expressed his sorrow that they were so soon to part company.

"I am sorry too," answered his companion, frankly; "I have to thank you for much more, I am sure, than the original obligation you conferred upon me."

He did not hear her words, though he understood that she meant to express something kind. His mind was occupied with the thought: "Why should I not see her again? Grantham is not so very far from Wellborough by railway. Why should I not ride over there, and renew my acquaintance?" He knew why he should not, very well. He was aware that such a course of conduct would be disgraceful to himself, dangerous to her, and traitorous to his wife. He was to a great extent a creature of his own impulses—whether they were bad or good—but not wholly so. If he had little or nothing of what is called "principle," he had some conscience; and his conscience was now making a last effort; rallying all her feeble powers to save the man from himself and ruin—and she succeeded.

This victory was not achieved by the noblest means. He did not say: "This temptation is base, and therefore I will withstand it." He was not even actuated by the reflection how ill he

would be acting towards the woman who, however she might have angered him—whatever might be his quarrel with her—he was well convinced was still devoted to him. His reason for acting right was sheer pity for his companion. It would be an "infernal shame"—that was how his thought shaped itself—to continue his acquaintance with this innocent girl, without confessing to her that he was a married man. Yet if he should confess it, he felt that their companionship would have lost its charm for both. In her pocket-book he had only written his initials, with a post-office address in London appended to them; and he now resolved not to reveal himself, but to part from her when the time arrived—but a few minutes hence—for ever. If this were one of those good resolutions with which the Minton of the Lower Regions is said to form its floor in mosaic—here a glittering temptation withstood, but in the end prevailing; here the fair blossom of a good deed which never comes to fruit—Cecil at least could urge that Fate itself was opposed to its accomplishment. As in the Trojan War the gods and goddesses were human combatants, so it does sometimes seem that some external Power, adverse to their good, opposes struggling mortals.

In the natural order of things, as set down in

the time-table, the Middleton train would have gone right on from Pullham Junction, at which it had now arrived, and would have reached Grantham in ten minutes. But as ill-luck would have it, the up-train—which was due at the Junction, and, after the passage of which, the Middleton-branch train should have crossed the line and proceeded on its way—was behind its time. The telegraph was not then used as it is now, to inform the driver of a waiting train how long it has to wait, but matters were left in such cases to the judgment of the station-masters. At first the Pullham official detained the branch train, upon the ground that, as the express was expected every instant, there would be no time to cross the rails; but presently, getting impatient, and foreseeing that evil hateful to station-masters, a "block" in his domain, he gave the signal to move on. It was a perilous order, and more so of course than when he had shrunk from it before; and everyone was conscious of it except the people most concerned—the passengers—but it was obeyed. As the long line of carriages moved on, the pointsman whose duty it was to turn them on to the Middleton line caught sight of the express, and losing his head at the imminence of the danger, turned the train on to the main line. Cecil, who, filled with grave thoughts,

kept his eyes averted from his companion, was looking out of window, and marked the action. He saw the terror in the man's face, even before he threw up his arms and uttered some unheard ejaculation, and guessed at once what had occurred. Thrusting his head and shoulders out of the carriage, he could see the express coming—still a long way off, but swift and sure as Fate to meet them.

"Rose," he said, unconsciously addressing the girl by her christian-name, "there is going to be an accident; there is not a moment to be lost. You must jump out." And he opened the carriage-door.

"An accident!—jump out!" she murmured, aghast with fear. "I can never do it."

The voices of men calling wildly mingled with the shrieks of the engine, as it screamed forth its passionate warning to its approaching brother.

"Then I will jump with you," said Cecil. He took her unresistingly in his arms; and as he did so, even in that moment of supreme peril, pressed her tenderly to his breast. "You will be safe with me," he murmured—though he was far from thinking so—as he stood with her upon the carriage-step. Her long brown hair had come unfastened and the fierce wind blew it about his ace, so that he could scarcely see; but, on the

whole, he judged the spot to be favourable for his venture.

The train was running in a cutting, and the bank rose high and green before him without stones. He leaped out, taking care to jump well forward; there was a rushing through the air, the shock of a dead-weight fall, and then a roar and crash, as though the very world were breaking up.

"Are you hurt?" was Cecil's eager inquiry, as, stunned and bruised, but not, as he imagined, seriously injured, he leant over his still prostrate companion.

"No—that is, a little," she murmured; "my arm is hurt. But do not mind me. Good heavens, look at the train!"

The train, or rather both trains, had come together, with a shock which, though greatly mitigated by the efforts of their respective drivers ere they leaped from their posts, had made a wreck of the foremost carriages, the fragments of which strewed the line. The air was rent with shrieks, and groans, and appalling cries for help.

"Run, run," cried Rose, "and give what help you can. I shall do very well till you come back."

It was not easy for Cecil to run, for he was very stiff and bruised; but he made what haste

he could to the scene of the catastrophe. As it happened, the majority of the passengers were more frightened than hurt; and, as the accident had occurred so near the station, there were soon plenty of persons on the spot to give assistance to the wounded. Feeling that his help could be dispensed with, Cecil therefore soon returned to his fair companion. She sat up to receive his report; but it was evident from her pale drawn face that she was in great pain.

"You must see a doctor, Rose, at once," said he. Circumstances had already placed them on terms of familiarity, such as it might have taken weeks to bring out in an ordinary way. "There are two surgeons with the train."

He helped her to her feet, and they slowly moved along together. Presently they passed by their *coupé*, which had been near the engine, and seemed to have been literally smashed to pieces.

"But for you, I should have been in that," said she, with a shudder, and a sudden clinging of her unwounded arm. "How much I owe you! and yet I do not even know the name of my preserver."

"Call me Henry," whispered he—"Henry Landon."

His christian-names were Cecil Henry, it may be remembered, though the latter was never

used by those who knew him. They obtained the attention of a doctor, who at once pronounced Miss Mytton's arm to be broken; it was a simple fracture, he said; and in a few minutes he had bound it up, and she was sitting in the waiting-room of the station. It was not possible to make up two trains out of the *débris* left by the collision, and carriages had to be sent for elsewhere.

"Do you feel easier now?" inquired Cecil of his charge, in tones that were now perhaps pardonably tender.

"Yes, as to the mere pain; but I am so distressed about my sister. If Helen should hear there had been an accident, before we get to Grantham, she will be half-distracted."

"How far is it to Grantham?"

"It is only seven miles by road."

"Then let us take a carriage at once. Of course I shall see you to your door."

She thanked him warmly, and without any pretence of rejecting his offer; her nerves had been so shaken, that she looked forward with positive horror to trusting herself again to the railway. This plan of Cecil's would bring her home much earlier than if she waited for the train; and moreover, she really felt unequal to

pursue her journey by either rail or road, alone. He therefore procured an open fly, and started with his fair companion. It is not surprising that the spectators of their departure should have deemed them man and wife; it was known that they had leaped together out of the train, and hence the highly-coloured account of their adventure which appeared in the newspapers the next morning, wherein "the young husband" figured as a hero, and which poor Ella and her friend perused at breakfast-time. Cecil and Rose did not talk much upon the journey, each being occupied with their own reflections, which were of a widely different kind. The former was conscious that he was in a position of great danger, from which he could not summon the courage to extricate himself by the only proper means. Fate had settled that he should be where he was, and without absolutely resolving to lay all that might come of it on Fate's shoulders, he felt inclined to temporise, nor did he appreciate the extreme difficulty of that course of conduct. He had found out there was an inn at Grantham where he could sleep, and had given orders to the driver to drop his portmanteau there upon the way to "The Casket."

When this was done, Rose observed, quickly: "You will dine with us, Mr. Landon, of course, to-night?"

"Indeed, I fear you will not be well enough to dine," said he; "you look as though you were in great pain."

"No, indeed," replied she, "my arm gives me but little uneasiness. I am anxious about Helen, that is all; when she finds the train behind its time she will be frightened about me, even if the news—— Oh, there is the vicar!"

The fly at this moment overtook a gentleman in clerical attire, who, considering his very considerable bulk, was walking at a most meritorious rate of speed; his hat was in one hand and a pocket-handkerchief in the other, with which he repeatedly wiped his brow.

"Thank goodness!" cried he, fervently, to Rose. "You are come at last! This is the third time I have been to the railway-station, bringing a fresh white lie every time to poor Helen to account for your absence. The station-master was so very reticent that I felt sure there had been some accident."

"So there was, Mr. Welby; and but for this gentleman's kind aid I should not be alive to tell you about it." She introduced the two

men; the vicar got into the carriage and shook hands with Cecil warmly.

"You will be welcome at Grantham, I promise you, sir. I hope you will dine and take a bed at the Vicarage."

"Indeed, Mr. Welby," said Rose, "Mr. Landon must dine with us—that is if you will keep him company."

"Of course I will," said the vicar; "only I am afraid you will be very fatigued after your journey, and scarcely equal to entertaining folks at dinner."

"It is not a question of fatigue," said Cecil, gravely. "Miss Mytton has had a serious accident; her arm is broken."

"Good heavens!" cried the vicar; "a broken arm! This will kill Helen."

"The point is whether it will kill *me*," exclaimed Rose, laughing. "It is, however, only a very small bone, the doctor said, and it is fortunately my left arm."

"But how on earth did it happen?"

"Well, I'm afraid I did it," said Cecil, with an air of contrition.

"You did it!" echoed the vicar.

"In saving my life," put in Rose, gravely. "Foreseeing that a collision was about to occur, Mr. Landon jumped with me from the carriage

—which I had not the courage to do by myself —and in the fall this mischief happened."

"Dear me," cried the vicar, "how deplorable! It will give Helen quite a shock!"

The outside of "The Casket"—that is, the front which faced the road, and was indeed actually upon it—was very plain and unpretending. It was just a two-storied cottage, surrounded with a little verandah, and looked as though it were directly at the foot of the giant hill that towered behind it, though, as we have learnt, there was a garden of considerable size between them.

As the fly stopped, a young lady ran out bareheaded to meet it. One might have been sure at once that Rose and she were sisters, the family likeness being very strong; but Helen looked much the older. She was pretty without doubt, but neither so pretty as Rose, nor of the same intellectual type. Her face was thinner and more thoughtful. She moved with grace, but more slowly than her sister; and pleased and excited as she evidently was, there was an air of sedateness, almost of restraint, about her, which contrasted with the other's natural gaiety.

The fact was, notwithstanding her nervous haste, she had caught sight of Cecil. He noticed

this, and said to himself, not without a shudder of fear: "A watch-dog." Rose noticed it also, and for the first time that day her face was suffused with a guilty flush. Not that she was conscious of having committed any imprudence, but because she felt her sister's look as the expressed suspicion of her having done so. Perhaps this caused her to be more earnest and grateful in the explanation, which she at once gave to Helen, of Cecil's presence. He hastened to hint that now he had seen Miss Rose Mytton in the safe custody of her friends, his duty was done; and even made a feint of re-entering the fly.

Rose looked at Helen imploringly, but, before she could speak, the vicar intervened with a plaintive air:

"Well, I have been asked to dine here on your account, Mr. Landon; so if you go away like this my invitation will be cancelled."

"I hope Mr. Landon will do us the honour of dining with us," observed Helen. Her voice was soft and low, like her sister's, but had a certain dignity rarely found in so young a woman. To Cecil's ear it almost seemed to repel—to sound like the growl of the watch-dog.

"I should be very pleased to accept your

invitation, Miss Mytton, if you are quite sure my presence would not be inconvenient. But your sister has met with an accident. Her arm is hurt, and perhaps repose and quiet——"

"An accident? Your arm hurt? Why, now I see it is in a sling. Pray come upstairs," and she carried her sister off at once, without bestowing any further notice upon her visitors.

"Come in, sir," said the vicar, coolly, leading the way into the house; "I told you she would be put out at anything having happened to dear Miss Rose."

"I don't wonder at it," said Cecil.

"No; and you would be still less surprised if you knew her. Miss Helen absolutely lives for her sister; she is her *raison d'être.*"

"And a very good *raison d'être* too," answered Cecil, mechanically imitating the vicar's pronunciation of the phrase, which was not Parisian.

"Ah, you admire her, doubtless. Indeed everybody does. Rose is 'the rose of all the rose-garden of girls,' as Helen says, and Helen is always right. That comes from Tennyson, you know. She has him at her fingers' ends."

"What, Miss Rose?"

"No, no, Miss Helen; you should see her illustrations of the May Queen:

"And that good man the clergyman has told me words of peace.

I sat for it in my canonicals."

"I should not have thought that had been necessary," said Cecil.

"So Miss Helen said, and made me take them off again," returned the other, dryly.

"Is not this a lovely spot?"

They had passed through the little house and into the garden, where everything breathed of spring. In the blue sky the lark was singing his evening hymn, and in the woods that crested the white cliff above them a thousand throats seemed to take up the joyous melody. The air was fragrant with flowers, and that fresh scent which every living growth, and even the earth itself, gives forth at that season. There were not many plots of flowers, though what were there were full of blossom; but there were clusters of shrubs here and there, and one or two drooping trees, with walks about them so disposed as to give an idea of extent—whereas the whole ground the garden covered was very small. It was, in truth, as the vicar had observed, a lovely spot; nor was the scene less fair when you looked towards

the cottage, with its two bright little sitting-rooms open to view, and a luxuriant creeper festooning it everywhere, so that the spaces for the door and windows seemed to be cut out of it.

"I call it a perfect Eden," continued Mr. Welby, observing with pleasure the admiration expressed in Cecil's face; "only without an Adam and without a serpent."

Cecil laughed, but not quite naturally. The vicar's parallel had gone farther with his companion than the reverend gentleman had calculated upon.

"You have never been in this district before, I suppose, Mr. Landon?" observed the vicar presently.

"Not at Grantham, no; but I know the country farther south, down Wellborough way."

"To be sure, I thought your name was familiar to me. You live at Wellborough, do you not, or have some connections there?"

Here was a chance for Cecil to tell the truth about himself, easily, naturally, and afterwards to have it broken for him by another—after he had left the place, perhaps—to Rose. He did not, however, seize the golden opportunity; he turned his back upon it, sharply, but designedly.

"No; I never lived at Wellborough. My family and I are Londoners."

This was true in a sense, of course; but in his sense it was a lie. From the moment he uttered it Cecil's destiny was sealed.

"Grantham must seem a great change to you after London," continued the unconscious vicar. "Although we have a railway-station, we live quite out of the world here; and as for our hostesses, I don't suppose they leave the village, except to go to Pullham at farthest, once in six months. Miss Rose's journey to town was unprecedented."

This intelligence was welcome to Cecil; not for any reason which he could have distinctly stated, but in a vague and general sort of way. Grantham would not only be a "great change" for him after London, but a very agreeable contrast if he should happen to come that way again. The young ladies were quiet, stay-at-home folks, as little given, in all probability, to curiosity, as to gadding about. Why should he not be occasionally entertained by them, as a friend, without revealing to them his family affairs, which, after all, did not concern them?

"Here is Miss Mytton, doubtless with a bulletin," exclaimed the vicar, as Helen came

towards them from the cottage. "Well, how is the patient?"

"Not so well as she thinks herself," returned the young lady, gravely. "Nevertheless, she has insisted upon coming downstairs." And she looked at Cecil, as he thought, reproachfully.

"I hope that is not upon—upon our account," said he, with a glance at the vicar.

"Well, she seems to fear that it would seem ungracious in her to be absent from the drawing-room—for the dinner-table is out of the question—though, in my opinion, she has an ample excuse. However, the matter is settled in accordance with her wish. In the meantime she bids me remind you, Mr. Landon—as she fears your solicitude upon her account may have caused you to forget the anxieties of others—that our post goes out shortly. If you wish to communicate with your friends—as to the accident on the railway, I mean," she added, for Cecil stared as well as blushed, "you will find writing materials in the drawing-room."

It was no wonder that her words had called the colour into Cecil's face, for he had for the time almost forgotten Ella's existence; nor had it struck him that she would hear of the accident through the papers.

"Your sister is very kind and thoughtful,"

said he. "I think I should like to write just a line."

She took him into the drawing-room, and left him with pen, ink, and paper. His first idea really was to write to Ella, but he now decided not to do so. He felt a hesitation in communicating with his wife, partly on account of his own feelings as respected her, but chiefly in connection with his present position. It would be an act of hypocrisy, and a disagreeable one; and he felt deception difficult enough, even when it ministered to his pleasure. Moreover, it was almost certain that the address of his letter would be perused by someone about the cottage on its way to the post-bag; and the words "Mrs. Landon" would tell everything. The post-mark "Grantham" too, on the envelope, would naturally have to be accounted for at home. Upon the whole, he decided upon telegraphing to Ella the next day upon his way to Wellborough, which, as we have seen, he put into effect. Meanwhile, he wrote to a certain friend of his in London—not a very scrupulous one—to ask him to take in any letters that might be sent to his address directed to him (Landon). He had not any positive plan in his mind, but if it should be necessary for him to leave some direction behind him, why should he not leave that? It was surely not absolutely

incumbent upon a man to tell where he lived, or how he lived, or whether he was married or single, without being asked the question—or, in all cases, even if he were asked?

Just as he had finished his note, which was brief enough—though, as he well knew, it would have plenty of significance for his correspondent—Rose entered the room.

Her left arm still rested in a sling, but she no longer looked pale and anxious; indeed, at the sight of him, her face wore a pretty flush of colour.

"I hope you are not imprudent in coming down so soon?" said Cecil, tenderly.

"Not at all," returned she, gaily; "I don't believe my arm is broken. The doctor said, you know, it was only a small bone. I can't help myself to food, of course, but Helen has promised to cut it up for me; and I could not deny myself the pleasure of dining with you, after all your kindness. I am glad to see my sister has reminded you of your duty to your friends in time," she added, pointing to the note he had just finished, "otherwise that would be another trouble on your shoulders, for which I should have to blame myself."

"My friends in town would have got over it, no doubt," answered Cecil, laughing.

The laugh, even more than the words, was false and shameful; it was the basest thing—and he knew it—that he had yet permitted himself to say; for the impression he wished to produce, and did produce, upon his companion was that there was no one much interested in his well-being in town, or anywhere else—except it might be at Grantham.

"You are doing your friends an injustice, Mr. Landon, I am sure," said Rose, earnestly. "One who is so kind to a stranger must certainly have won the hearts of those who know him."

"You are mistaken, Miss Rose, indeed, but especially so in calling yourself a stranger. You do not seem so to me, I do assure you."

Here the French window was suddenly darkened by Helen's figure; it would have been plain to them both that she must needs have heard his last remark, even if her face had looked less grave.

Cecil, wolf though he felt himself fast becoming, hung his head in a very sheepish manner, but Rose, with woman's readiness, spoke up at once.

"Mr. Landon thinks, after what he and I have gone through together to-day, Helen, that it is hard that I should consider him as a stranger, and yet, would you believe it, all the address he

vouchsafed to write down in my pocket-book was, 'C. H. L., Post Office,' in some street in London."

"Nay, that was at the beginning of our acquaintance, Miss Rose," observed Cecil, "and, as the affair between us was merely a pecuniary one, I thought it would savour of impertinence to force, as it were, my personal acquaintanceship upon you."

"Your reticence, in my opinion, did you credit, Mr. Landon," said Helen, quietly.

"It did him great credit, I have no doubt," remarked the vicar at the window. "What is it that Mr. Landon has been doing, Miss Helen, to meet commendation, which, with you, is never misplaced?"

"Is that why you so seldom get it, Mr. Welby?" said Rose, laughing.

"Perhaps so," answered the vicar, lugubriously. "But what business has a young lady with a broken arm to come down to dinner? You, Miss Helen, who have seen the extent of her calamity, don't you think it imprudent——?"

"Helen has seen, and fought, and been conquered," interrupted Rose, imperiously; "and it is settled I am to dine, Mr. Welby. And here is dinner, and here am I."

Indeed, the dinner was announced almost immediately, and the little party adjourned to the next room, where Rose was accommodated on the sofa, with a little table all to herself, but within reach of the conversation. She did not take much part in it; but when Cecil spoke, a keen observer would have perceived that her interest was always awakened; when the others talked—or rather, when Mr. Welby did so, for he took the lion's share of the conversation—she would also sometimes exchange with Cecil a glance of humorous intelligence; for the vicar was "great fun," and the greater because he was not always aware of it. Like most divines who are worth much, he was something of a humorist, and a capital narrator of such matters as fell within his own experience. But, on the other hand, his devotion to Helen manifested itself in a manner so pronounced, as, to say the least of it—especially as it was quite unreciprocated—was inconsistent with common sense. There was no doubt as to which of the jewels in "The Casket" would have been his jewel, if he could have obtained possession of it. Her opinions in general were his opinions, and even her "views" upon theological matters, though by no means orthodox, were treated by him in a very different way than would have

been the case if they had come from the lips of another. The squire of the village, it seemed, was a very Low Churchman, and the vicar —he could do it with a clear conscience, being himself "high and dry," made very merry at his expense, obviously for Helen's delectation.

"I got our Calvinistic friend this morning," said he, "into a cleft stick, and pinched him. Everybody is to be burnt, you know, for ever and ever, who disagrees with the squire; and to-day he went into particularities, which are really very funny, since the squire himself would not hurt a fly."

> "You tell me, you, whose light blue eyes
> Grow tender over drowning flies,
> You tell me Doubt is devil-born,"

quoted Helen.

"Ah, just so," said the vicar, "only his eyes are not light blue, are they?"

"I did not mean to be so literal," said Helen.

"Of course you didn't. You're too sensible; but the squire did. He was very strong upon every individual limb, since they had all offended, being burnt continually."

"'Unless the man becomes regenerate,' said I.

"'Of course,' he admitted.

"'Very good; then suppose a very wicked person loses his leg, or his arm, in a railway accident,'" added the vicar, with a sly look at Rose, "'and afterwards becomes regenerate, what becomes of the unregenerate leg?' You never saw a man so puzzled in your life. He said he'd 'consult his books,' like an old fortune-teller, and think about it."

"This is a free country, Mr. Welby," observed Rose, "and everybody has a right to his opinion."

"When it is not at variance with those of the Church, Miss Rose," replied the vicar, reprovingly.

"But one can't help having opinions, whether they are those of the Church or not," suggested Helen.

"Well, of course not; no," said the vicar. "I was thinking rather of the free expression of them."

"But if we have opinions which we do not dare express, we are wicked or cowardly," argued Helen.

"That is true, Miss Helen," answered the vicar. "There can, therefore, be no harm, for example, in Mr. Landon giving his views upon a matter upon which you hold such a very strong opinion—the barreta question."

"Now pray don't let us go into that," said Helen, appealingly.

"But you must let Mr. Landon speak," urged Rose, wickedly.

"Well, upon my word," said Cecil, who had not the faintest idea what the "barreta question" was, "there is a good deal to be said on both sides."

"A very sensible observation," remarked the vicar.

"But one which, I am afraid, evinces a lack of moral courage," observed Helen.

"I am afraid I am rather deficient in that commodity," confessed Cecil, modestly; and, indeed, he had never felt himself so destitute of it as since he had come to Grantham.

"Mr. Landon has, fortunately, courage of another kind," remarked Rose, quietly; "the sort that enables one to jump from a railway-train with a fellow-creature who has none at all."

"Among Mr. Welby's parishioners, there are probably fifty men who would have done just the same," observed Cecil.

"In the case of Miss Rose, or Miss Helen, I think there may be; because everybody adores them both," replied the vicar, with his eyes fixed on the latter young lady; "but as to heroes,

there is only one in the parish who can claim to be one by virtue of his profession."

"Who on earth is that?" inquired Miss Helen.

"Old Jacob Wright. When I first came to Grantham I inquired whether there were any old soldiers in the village, and was referred to Jacob as its only veteran. So I called at his cottage, and put some questions as to his military career.

"'How long ago was it since you left the army?' I asked.

"'Better than thirty years, sir,' was his reply.

"'Then you could not have been a soldier very long.'

"'Noa, not very, sir.'

"'Were you in the cavalry or the infantry?'

"'I was in the foot, sir; the Forty-second Foot.'

"'A gallant regiment. Did you see much service in it?'

"'Noa, sir.'

"'Did you go abroad with it?'

"'Noa, sir.'

"'Well, now, tell me what you did do.'

"'Well, thirty years agone, sir, I was at Middleton Fair with some other young chaps,

and we got a-drinking, and, somehow or another, a recruiting-sergeant as was there got hold of me, and I was enlisted.'

"'Well, what then?'

"'Why, you see, sir, it was a Saturday night, and all the next day I was in the army reg'lar—a Forty-second man. But o' Monday morning, my old mother, as I lived with, she came to hear on it, and was a'most out of her wits, and she took her savings out of an old stocking, and came and bought me off. And then I was a free man again.'

"That's the story of our only veteran," concluded Mr. Welby. All his hearers thought it an excellent story, especially Cecil, who foresaw that he would have no difficulty in getting on with the vicar; yet Helen took occasion to observe that the "veteran" was an old humbug, and that false pretence was to her mind the most odious of vices. "Don't you agree with me, Mr. Landon?"

It was, doubtless, an accidental appeal; but it was with considerable embarrassment that Cecil gave in his adhesion.

He was aware that there was in Grantham, at that moment at least, as great an impostor as Jacob Wright. Every look and word that Rose bestowed upon him, reminded him of the

fact, and, what was worse, when Helen spoke, his guilty mind suggested that she had her suspicions.

The evening passed away, upon the whole, enjoyably; the good manners of the two hostesses and the good-humour of the vicar would, under other circumstances, have placed him thoroughly at his ease, and, even as it was, he felt himself at home at "The Casket." On the other hand, at the door of his heart, which he had shut, as it were, in her very face, Conscience still beat with an importunate hand; he heard it, even when Rose was speaking to him in tones which he well knew, for all the prudence of her words were meant for tenderness; and when he had parted from her and her sister, and the vicar's last "Good-night" had died away on the evening air, and he was taking his way home alone to his inn, the voice of self-reproach grew very loud. It was idle then for him to repeat to himself—and for himself—as he had done in company, that he was merely playing his part as a chance visitor, here to-day and gone to-morrow; that he had made himself as agreeable as he could to his late companion, as it behoved a gentleman to do, and that was all. The very echo of his footsteps, in their monotonous fall, seemed to say, "You lie, you lie;" nay, every beat of his passionate

heart said likewise. He knew that he had made love to Rose Mytton, as much as seeming honest love within so short a space could have been made. He was ashamed and bitter against himself; but even his very penitence was shameful. For he thought, not of the wrong he was doing to his own true wife, but only of the pain that might befall, because of him, the woman he could never call his own.

CHAPTER II.

THE FLIGHT FROM TEMPTATION.

Cecil Landon's life at Woolwich had made him no sybarite, and it was not the hard bed and the half-stuffed pillows at the "Stranger's Rest" that night which kept him wakeful, but his own tumultuous thoughts and fears—the battle between his good and his bad angel above his head. Like all men who have placed themselves in a similar position, he sought to defend himself by sophistry. He allowed that he was acting ill, but then he was the victim not of circumstances only but of necessity; for was not love all-powerful, and was not this the first time that he had ever experienced its influence? Ella had fascinated him, and he had married her; but Rose was the only girl whom he had ever really loved.

He arose early, unrefreshed, dissatisfied, and

unresolved; but as the clear summer air blew in upon him, it seemed to cleanse and purify his mind. To the unaccustomed sense (unless our nature has been wholly spoilt and dissipated) there is something inexpressibly pure in the influence of a country morning. If it has no moral teaching, it is, at least, antagonistic to the baser passions. The song of birds, the murmur of brooks, are the accessories of domestic drama, and very unsympathetic with plots, and strategies, and underhand proceedings.

"Bring me a Bradshaw," said Cecil at breakfast, and though Bradshaw was unknown at the "Stranger's Rest," the landlady brought him a local time-table. By that means he discovered that he could start within an hour from Grantham, before the ladies at "The Casket" were likely to be stirring; and he resolved to fly the place and its temptation. He must call at the cottage, of course, but would do so only to leave some message accounting for his hurried departure. It would not be easy, but it would certainly be less difficult than proceeding with that structure of hypocrisy which he had yesterday commenced. And what did it matter what was thought of him—nay, the worse the better, so far as Rose was concerned, and it was the thought of her, to do him justice, which was moving him to this

good resolve—when he should have turned his back on Grantham for ever? Thus it is with all men of mere impulse, who are more numerous than the philosophers would have us believe; with them self-interest is not the ruling motive, nor even self-gratification, nor does every straw show which way the wind blows with them. Their actions cannot be calculated upon; they are themselves straws blown about by every sudden gust of passion, or fancy, or good, or bad intent.

The "Stranger's Rest" did not boast of any wheeled conveyance, but the "Boots" took Cecil's luggage for him in a barrow; they had to make a slight detour on the road to the station in order to call at the cottage, and by the time they arrived there its inmates were astir. These, however, as Cecil honestly hoped, would only consist of the domestics—he felt that to see Rose would be to endanger his good resolves. He did not see Rose, but as he was leaving his message with the servant who answered his summons, Helen appeared at the front door.

"You are up betimes, Mr. Landon," said she, as they shook hands.

"Up, and, I am sorry to say, going," returned Cecil, pointing to the man with the luggage. "On consulting the time-table, I found that

unless I went by the first train, I should be late for the business I have in hand in Wellborough to-day. I trust your sister finds herself pretty well this morning, or at least on the high road to recovery."

"Rose has had a pretty good night, thank you; I know that much, though I have not spoken with her this morning, but have given orders that she should not be disturbed."

"Quite right. Pray give her my—my best wishes for her well-doing. I am sorry, indeed, that I should thus be compelled to hurry away, without wishing her good-bye; but necessity compels me to do so."

"You know best where your duty lies," replied Helen, with a twitch of her proud lips.

"I know where my pleasure lies, at all events," said Cecil, gallantly; "but unfortunately it must give way in this case."

"I am sorry you are going," continued the young lady, in slow and measured tones; "because I should have liked to evince my gratitude to you, if it were possible, for the great service you have done my sister. But since your pleasure and your duty are incompatible, you are quite right to——"

"I did not say that," interrupted Cecil, quickly.

"I inferred it from what you did say," answered she, quietly. "Once again I thank you, Mr. Landon, for your care of Rose. By-the-bye, there is a material debt we owe you, if you will kindly tell me what it is"—she coloured, as indeed did he, for it is not pleasant for a young lady to settle money matters, purse in hand, with a young gentleman—"or perhaps, if you will furnish me with your address, which I believe you have omitted to do—"

"It is here," said Cecil, quickly, tearing out a leaf from his pocket-book, on which he had already set down the direction of the friend to whom he had written on the previous night. "The debt is a mere bagatelle, but if you would kindly let me know how Miss Rose progresses——"

"I think there is no fear of her not progressing favourably, Mr. Landon," interrupted Helen, coldly.

"Please, sir, there bean't much time if you be agoing by the yeat vourteen" (8.14), put in the "Boots" respectfully.

There was no option for Cecil but to say farewell; otherwise, he had caught the far-off tones of a voice that thrilled every fibre of his frame, and, at the sound of which, all his prudent resolutions vanished.

"Good-bye, Mr. Landon; I must not make you late."

Her words were not uncivil, yet her manner plainly showed that she wished to be rid of him. The very way—or so it seemed to him—in which she clasped his hand, her light grip of it, and then the casting of it away, implied, even in its thanks for service done, the same desire. He turned upon his heel; a feeling of irritation weighing with his sense of ill desert, and set out towards the station with rapid strides.

Five minutes back, and he would have been glad to have got away at almost any price, but he had heard Rose Mytton's voice, and so great was his infatuation, that now he would fain have stopped at almost any risk. He was a wolf, he owned, but no less he raged against the watch-dog that had faced him out, and driven him from the fold.

Scarce had the door of the cottage closed behind Cecil's retreating figure, before Rose, pale and trembling, stood at her sister's side.

"Who is that to whom you have been speaking, Helen—and saying 'good-bye?'"

"Hush, hush—come out of the passage."

She meant away from that door; for Rose had made as though she would have opened it, and followed Cecil.

"Mr. Landon has gone away upon urgent business. Indeed, indeed, my darling, it is better so."

She had put her arms about the girl, but Rose shook herself free of them, and confronted her with upbraiding eyes.

"Better, why better? You have sent him away, Helen, you know you have, because of your own base suspicions."

"He had to go, dear, indeed he had; and called to say 'Good-bye!'"

"Then why did I not see him? I, whose life he saved, and who owe him so much. How ungrateful he must think me!"

"No, dear, not so. He only thought *me* unkind. That is not pleasant, but I can bear it. Indeed, it is better thus."

"That is because you hate him."

"I do not hate him, Rose. I rather like him; but I love you better than ten thousand Mr. Landons, and therefore I am glad he has gone. He was deceiving us, I am sure of it; there was something in the background."

"On the contrary," interrupted Rose, "I never met a man more frank and open."

"That is his character, no doubt, which makes his reticence about himself and his affairs the more suspicious."

"You praised him yourself, Helen, for being so reticent."

"With respect to his address I did, because at that time I thought the reason he gave for it the true one. I do not think so now. It is quite possible, remember, for a man to be kind and gentle with a young lady like yourself, and to be as brave as a lion, and yet to be without good principles. As to his going away so suddenly, without rhyme or reason, I may say of it that nothing became him during his stay at Grantham so much as his leaving it. Nothing could possibly have happened—because no information could have reached him here—to cause him to change his plans, and I therefore ascribe his departure to his good feeling. He felt he might place himself—I don't say he has already done so—in a false position, if he remained longer."

"He has placed me in no false position, at all events," returned Rose, indignantly. "He has not said a word that a gentleman should not say, or that you might not have listened to yourself."

"I am glad to hear it," said Helen, quietly; "the least said the soonest mended. Come, don't let our first quarrel, darling, be on account of a man upon whom neither you nor I ever

set eyes before yesterday. It is a very short acquaintance, surely, on which to build——"

"I have built nothing, Helen," interrupted the other, quickly. "But there are times—short enough in duration—in which half a lifetime appears to be comprised. I have met this man but once, it is true; but under circumstances that showed his true nature, his generosity, his pity, his delicacy of feeling; and then came the greatest peril that I have yet encountered, and, by his good sense and courage he preserved my life. Is it surprising, then, that I think his being dismissed in this way discourteous and ungrateful; that to think that—that"—here she burst into tears—"I shall never see him more, is painful and distressing to me?"

"Again, I say, dear Rose," replied Helen, tenderly, yet with the same firmness as before, "that I did not dismiss him. He could have stayed had he pleased, and, if he pleases, he may come back."

"Come back?" echoed Rose, eagerly. "Did he speak of coming back?"

Helen shook her head.

"No; how could he," continued Rose, "when you almost turned him out of doors?"

Helen answered nothing, having already twice refuted that same charge.

"Don't let us talk about him, Helen, any more; when I hear you do so, it seems difficult to love you as I ought to do. If he does not return——"

"He will not return," put in Helen, quietly.

"That is your opinion. I say, if he does not, pray mention him no further; if he does, you must allow that I have been right so far, and possibly may be a better judge of Mr. Landon than yourself."

Her speech implied that if he did come back she should take her own way with him, in spite of her sister; but Helen made no remonstrance, feeling sure, perhaps, in her own mind, that Cecil would not return. She simply stooped beside the chair into which Rose had cast herself, and kissed her sister's cheek; and Rose looked up and returned the kiss. The ratification of peace between them was thus signed and sealed.

That very day, two hundred miles or so from Grantham, a conversation, as we know, was held between two other women with respect to this same man, the one accusing, the other defending, him; only, in this case, the accuser was she who loved him best, and bore his name. It was surely no little thing in any man to have inspired such defenders When I think of such

men, and of the love that is lavished, and, as it seems, wasted on them, I am reminded of those lines of the French poet, in which he hazards the inquiry, Whether genius be not itself a virtue in the eyes of Heaven? It is not with genius, indeed, that we have to do in this case. Cecil Landon had no claims to that distinction; but the power of pleasing—of personal attraction—which he did possess, though less rare than genius, is almost as magical in its way.

If the reader shall be presently tempted to say, "This Landon is worthless," let him pause to consider the matter, or, at least, to add in mitigation, "and yet how two pure women loved him!" Nothing is more common than to entertain respect where love and even liking refuse to keep company with that sentiment. Some men, and even women, wear their virtues so stiffly and unbecomingly that they repel rather than attract; but the reverse of this, which is at least equally common, namely, that the love and liking, and of the Good, attach themselves to those for whom there can be no respect, is a problem worthy of some attention.

CHAPTER III.

A CHANCE OPINION.

Cecil Landon had escaped from Grantham as a fowler out of the snare of the bird, but he still hankered after the bird. He had heard her song that morning, though he had not seen her, and, unconscious siren that she was, it had once more fascinated him. He had escaped, but his safety gave him no contentment, and he almost regretted that he had not suffered himself to be taken captive. "Our thoughts are free," we are told, and in one sense, they too often are so, but we are not all masters of our thoughts; and Cecil had no more control over his own, than over the iron steed that was whirling him to Middleton. When he arrived there, however, and was waiting for the train that was to carry him to his destination, he so far came to himself as to send that telegram to his wife, of which we have heard,

and also one to the manager at Wellborough, to announce his coming on that day. He did not know, of course, that the latter was at that moment sending word to Ella, that he had not arrived. As it happened, too, when he did arrive, the manager had been summoned elsewhere, and he sent those "full particulars by post"—as his telegram had promised, but which were by no means full—without having seen him. His deception thereby became, as we have seen, much complicated; though, as it chanced when the time came for explanation, graver matters prevented Ella from demanding it.

He arrived at his journey's end in due course, and transacted business at the office; and the duties that were so uncongenial to him were, for the first time, positively welcome; for while engaged in them he forgot to think of Rose Mytton, and the fever of his mind was for the time allayed. He did not encourage it, but never having been accustomed to the least mental discipline, the subject recurred to him during every interval of leisure. He had a private sitting-room at the hotel, but solitude had become hateful to him; so, after a dinner at which he could not eat, but drank freely, and notwithstanding that promiscuous acquaintances were in general by no means welcome

to him, he sought the smoking-room of the hotel for company. This apartment was tenanted by only one individual, who, when he entered it, was reading a London newspaper. He did not put it aside, but dropped it on his knees, as though ready either for conversation or silence. He was a short, stout, intelligent-looking man, of respectable appearance, and looked like a country lawyer, as, indeed, he was.

"Good evening, sir," said he to Cecil; "bad accident that at Pullham Junction yesterday, and might have been very bad."

"Yes, indeed," returned Cecil.

He had no particular reason for concealing that he had been a passenger by the unlucky train, but he did not say so; the unwonted habit of deception was perhaps gaining upon him.

"These newspaper accounts of accidents always amuse me," continued the stranger. "If a bit of romance can be squeezed into them, one is sure to get it."

"I have not read the account."

"Ah, then, I'll read this bit to you," and the stranger read, in a very unromantic tone, that episode of the young husband and wife saved by leaping from the railway carriage, which had so interested Ella and Gracie.

"Now, that's what I call a telling bit," observed the stranger, laughing. "In all probability the event never occurred, and if it did, you may depend upon it they were not husband and wife at all. My experience of the married state—— But, then, perhaps you're not a bachelor, and yet you look too young to be a Benedict?"

Cecil inclined his head with a smile which might have meant either that he was married, or was not; and his companion chose to take it in the latter sense.

"Well, I say that there are very few husbands, in my opinion, who would jump out of a railway-carriage, when in motion, with their wives, though some of them might do so to get quit of them."

"That is very true," said Cecil.

Perhaps he was wishing to himself that the jumping out of a train was a legal dissolution of the marriage-tie.

"More histories are told in the papers pointing that way than the other, at all events," continued the stranger, with a malicious chuckle. "Just listen to to-day's doings in the Divorce Court, for example."

"I have read them," answered Cecil, coldly.

It was becoming clear to him that this man

was a bore—a bore of the worst type—a creature that will read the newspaper aloud. He had not seen it that day himself, but when one is dealing with savages, artifice is held to be allowable.

"You saw that case in the police-court, yesterday, of course, where the man was acquitted of bigamy?"

"I am not sure," said Cecil, with an effort to suppress a groan. "I generally do read the police cases."

"Oh, but this was a most remarkable one. Both the gentleman and the lady appear to have been very sagacious, and had a shrewd conviction, before marriage, that they should get tired of one another afterwards, since they married under false colours—at least, the man's name was a false one. Their misgivings turned out to be well founded; for the gentleman, at least, soon got tired of his bargain and married somebody else. Under these circumstances—though she did not want him herself one bit—it was only what might have been expected, that his first wife gave him in charge for marrying Number Two, he well knowing that his lawful spouse was yet alive. In this, however, she must have been carried away by her feelings, for she would certainly not have moved

in the matter had she taken sound legal advice. She had, of course, not a leg to stand upon; her supposed husband was acquitted of the bigamy, and wife Number Two was declared to be wife Number One."

"I do not quite understand you," said Cecil, slowly. "I am not learned in legal matters. Why was the man acquitted?"

"Because the first marriage was not worth a rush. The parties adopted the false name, to deceive the public, which, of course, made void their union. The first wife had no standing in the eyes of the law whatever."

"But suppose the wife had married under a false name, instead of the husband, would not that have made a difference?"

"Not a scintilla. The marriage would have been void in that case just as much as in the other—— I am afraid your cigar is a little strong?"

Cecil had turned deadly pale; the room seemed to spin round with him, and a cold perspiration bedewed his brow. It was no wonder —to look at him—that his companion should have concluded him to be unaccustomed to tobacco, or to be suffering from the effects of a too-powerful "weed."

"I'll just put the window open an inch or

two," continued the stranger, good-naturedly. "There, you're better now, ar'n't you?"

"Thank you, yes; I am much better. It is not the smoke, but a little faintness to which I am occasionally subject. You were talking of some divorce case, were you not, when I felt the attack coming on?"

"Well, it was scarcely that, for the matter only came before the police-court, the parties being in very humble life—a costermonger and his wife; but the legal point was rather curious. You may read it *in extenso* in yesterday's *Telegraph.* There's a nice case too about the beer license—— Hullo; John, is it time?"

Here the waiter came to say the omnibus was coming round that was to take the stranger to the mail-train. He rose from his chair at once, and began to button his coat.

"The fact is I have got a parallel case myself, and this very week—not a hundred miles from here—you'll see it in the *Wellborough News,* and I shall take the same exception. It will be new to the county justices. The point is, 'Was it beer?' My defence will be—— Oh! the 'bus? Very good. Good morning, sir."

"Who is that gentleman?" inquired Cecil of the waiter, as he cleared away his late customer's toddy apparatus.

"That gentleman, sir? A very well-known gentleman, indeed—Mr. Everett, the lawyer, of Middleton. They call him 'Ever right' in this part of the country, because he always gets the justices into the wrong box."

"Is he a barrister or an attorney?"

"He's a lawyer, sir. 'Old six-and-eight' they calls him at the 'Blue Bells;' but that's because he's a good friend to the 'Heagle.'"

"Just so; if you can get me yesterday's *Telegraph* and bring it to my sitting-room, I'll give you a shilling for it."

Five minutes afterwards Cecil sat alone in his own apartment, turning over the stale newspaper's ruffled leaves. His face was no longer pale, but wore a hectic flush; his fingers trembled as they performed their task; and his eyes were keen and eager. He looked like a man in a fever, and, in fact, was so; but he felt like one who, after sharp grievous pain, imagines himself to be convalescent. The lawyer had spoken truth as respected the case of bigamy, in every particular; he had only left out the record of the husband's shamelessness and the first wife's passionate upbraidings, which were duly descanted upon by the reporter; the law was expounded by the magistrate in a few pithy sentences as clear as daylight, and the charge dismissed accordingly.

What followed, however, from this incident of the police-court, was to Cecil Landon of immeasurable importance.

It was evident that Ella's deception at the time of their marriage had invalidated it in the eye of the law; she was not his wife at all, and he himself was a free man.

There was no reason—that a lawyer could urge, at least—why he should not return to Grantham the next morning and offer himself as a lawful husband to Rose Mytton. To this conclusion his mind leaped forward at a spring, but presently subsided into other considerations, at least as grave if not quite so attractive. Their cases might be parallel, in a legal point of view, but Cecil was not like the defendant of the police-sheet, who was described as laughing in the face of the woman he had ruined and abandoned.

The idea of such a desertion filled him with remorse and shame, though it did not shut the brighter prospect out; and if this were the case at the first flush—if he could look such a protest as he was meditating in the face, and find it already attractive, though with drawbacks—it was but too probable that time would dull his scruples on the one hand, and sharpen his desires on the other. From Ella he was far away, and separated from her much more than by mere

distance—by a sense of coldness and dissatisfaction; to Rose he was comparatively near, could be present with her whenever he chose, and was attracted towards her by many a magnet, to none of which, it is true, his heart ought to have responded, but to which it turned as a needle to the pole. Amid the tumult of his thoughts, the singularity of the fact that he had never entertained a doubt about the legality of his marriage before now, struck him forcibly; but the true explanation of it—namely, that the wish, which is the father of the thought, to find it illegal had not before crossed his mind—did not occur to him. He felt rather that he had been wanting in conscientiousness to have ignored the circumstance so long. Ella's motive for deceiving him had nothing, he allowed, to do with their union itself; but she *had* deceived him for all that, and, also, set the law at defiance. He might, of course, offer her reparation, and make it, by a second and lawful marriage. But did he owe her reparation? He had not deceived her, but she him. On the other hand, if he did not make it, and, above all, if he married Rose, he would be effecting nothing less than Ella's ruin. "Dog, Coward, Cheat," were some of the flowers of speech with which the first wife in the police-court had saluted her faithless

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spouse, and Cecil owned to himself that, if he should act thus towards the woman who unquestionably believed herself to be, in the sight of Heaven, his lawful wife, he should justly deserve every one of these epithets, even though she might scorn to use them.

Then he thought of how she loved him, and he shuddered. He did not dare to say to himself that the wrong she had done him could justify so dire a punishment. To do him justice, he had, indeed, no notion of punishing her. The very thoughts he entertained—independent of their accomplishment—transferred all wrong to his own shoulders, and made him the offending party. Still he did entertain them, and, from that moment, alas! entertained little else. His mind, however, dwelt little on the legal point, notwithstanding its importance. Whatever he had set himself hitherto in earnest to do, whether in his work at the Military Academy, or in his present commercial calling, Cecil Landon had done well; and it is a peculiarity of men who know their own business thoroughly to suppose others do the like, and to respect their opinions accordingly. Moreover, in affairs that were outside of his own, Cecil, like most men of his stamp, had never taken much interest. The law in particular had been a sealed book to him, and

Mr. Everett's exposition of it, backed, as it was, by the London magistrate's decision, was to his own mind final and conclusive.

His reflections, therefore, upon the astonishing revelation which had thus, by the merest accident, been made to him, were confined solely to sentiment on the one hand and desire on the other—his pity for Ella and his passion for Rose. They occupied him for hours as he sat alone in the comfortless inn-parlour, and afterwards as he lay upon his sleepless pillow; but he arrived at no decision. All he resolved upon was procrastination. Fortunate it was for him that he had already despatched his note to Ella. Its composition had been difficult even at the time he had written it; but now it would have been well-nigh impossible. How *could* he have written to her with such traitorous thoughts agitating his mind?

It was bad enough to think of her in connection with them; but to write to her, to speak with her, to take her hand—no! To that he felt his powers of hypocrisy, notwithstanding their late vigorous growth, would be wholly unequal. He must break with Rose, before he could again meet Ella. The breaking with Ella was a thought made terrible, not by regret, indeed, but by the keenest pangs of remorse and

shame; but the breaking with Rose was impossible. And the miserable, passionate creature thought he could meet Rose again without, at all events for the present, breaking with Ella.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WOLF IN THE FOLD.

I SOMETIMES wonder—but always to myself, lest the susceptibilities of those who hold "Whatever is, is right," should be wounded—whether it might not be of advantage to the human race if less time were given us for reflection. On the whole, the impulses of men are, at least, as good as their principles; and certainly self-interest asserts herself more and more, the longer the opportunity that is afforded her to do so. How often do we say, "This will be right," and then, after a little thought—though the act remains as right as ever—"But is it expedient?" or "Is it advantageous?" after which the good deed is postponed indefinitely. Even as a matter of intelligence, it is better in nine cases out of ten, where promptness is possible, to act with promptness.

The whist-player, who takes time to think, as he miscalls it, generally increases the magnitude of his impending transgression. But in moral cases the proverb, "Second thoughts are best," has always a selfish significance. They are best, no doubt, for oneself and one's own gratification; but that is all. Where the question lies between "What is right?" and "What is pleasant?" to hesitate is, indeed, to be lost. The temptation with an unprincipled, but not wholly abandoned, character to procrastinate in such a case is immense. He wishes to establish for himself a sort of neutral territory between good and ill, in which he can debate the matter in question, and, as he says to himself, come to a just conclusion; this is a sort of purgatory that leads eventually to the Infernal Regions. It is a mistake to suppose that bad impulses are to be resisted; they are to be knocked down and trampled under foot at once. If you come to argue with them, they will beat the best rhetorician or philosopher, who is but human after all.

Poor Cecil Landon was very human, but not at all a philosopher, so it may be guessed how it fared with him in his question of conscience. He did not, however, give way at once to his temptation. He contrived the matter so saga-

ciously that he left it in the hands of Fortune; while, at the same time, he supplemented her so as to make all sure. He made up his mind that he would take no action in the matter of Rose Mytton unless he heard from Grantham. If she made no sign, neither would he; but, then, as we are aware, he felt certain that the cheque would come to him for her railway fare, and with the cheque there would surely be a few lines.

In the meantime, he worked at his office like a horse, and did all he could to stop his thinking. He might as well have tried to stop the stars from twinkling in the vault of heaven. His imagination was ceaselessly active; now, he was with Ella, forlorn, forsaken, wondering at his cruel silence; or picturing her to himself as she would look one day, when the news came that she was not his wife, and that he was the husband of another woman. He saw the fierce denial in her glowing eyes, and then the despair of her proud face, when the truth was forced upon her. He saw his father, shamed and sorrowful; and all the faces of his friends—Darall among them—cold, contemptuous, and averted. He saw Colonel Gerard Juxon, furious, revengeful, thirsting for his blood; and this was the least hateful of the spectres of the Future

that thus haunted him. He was not afraid; he could give back word for word, and blow for blow, but against himself, and against those other ones—and especially against her who loved him—he had no defence. He saw Rose, tender and shrinking, dragged, as it were, from her peaceful home into publicity; the sport of vulgar minds, the scorn of natures pure and gentle as her own; trustful in him to the last and forgiving him, but wounded, nevertheless, to her heart's core. He saw Helen's noble face turned upon him with loathing; he saw the good vicar's honest scorn. There are many sins pleasant enough in their fruition—in their blossom of a day—but whose Before and After may well give us pause; and here, indeed, was one of them. If Rose was to be his heaven, he had to pass through purging fires indeed to gain her; and when he had done so, the fires would burst out afresh and with tenfold fury. The thought of the consequences of what he meditated was sometimes so overwhelming, that he almost resolved to abandon it; but it was the "almost" of King Agrippa.

On the third day a letter came for him under cover from his friend in town, whose address he had given to Helen. For many minutes he did not dare to open it; but sat with it in his hand,

conning the handwriting, which, though a lady's, was very distinct and clear. In that "Henry Landon," so bold and steady, he did not seem to recognise Rose's hand. And yet whose but hers could it be? She would scarcely have deputed Helen to write for her; though, even if she had, there would be some message, which, let it be what it might, would take him back to Grantham. He had shifted the responsibility of the matter from his own shoulders, so he reasoned, to those of Fate, and now Fate had decided for him that he was to return.

Presently he opened the envelope with reverent care so as not to destroy the address—the first lines of her dear handwriting he had ever seen—and out dropped the cheque and a note.

"Dear Sir,—I enclose the amount which you were so good as to pay for my sister's railway fare, and remain yours truly and obliged,

"Helen Mytton."

Rose had not written at all. He was so amazed and even offended that, for the moment, he could make nothing of it. What on earth could it mean? It was not her right arm that was injured? Why, therefore, had she not written? And she had not sent so much as a

word of kindness. One might have supposed that he would now have owned, "Well, Fate has decided against me." So soon as he began to reflect, however, he at once came to the conclusion that Helen had written, without telling her sister that she was doing so. It was to Helen he had given the address, and not to Rose, who had only his initials at a post-office in her pocket-book. Perhaps she had written thither. He had a great mind to take the mail-train to town that evening and go to that post-office; but, on the whole, he thought he might venture to telegraph, paying, of course, for the reply. In half an hour he received it. "There is no letter lying for H. L." Fate, then, one would say, had evidently declared against him. Cecil, on the contrary, drew a directly contrary conclusion. Rose had wished to write, but was deterred from doing so by her prudish sister, aided by her slave, the vicar; she was acting under compulsion, and it was the duty of an honourable man to go to her rescue. She had been persuaded—no, not persuaded, for that was impossible—but her ear had been abused concerning him; it was incumbent, therefore, upon him to go and defend his character. Or, again, they had told her that it was unladylike, unmaidenly, in her to write to him, and that any

communication between them should come from his side, not from hers. He would, therefore, make it at once, and in person.

This contingency had been arranged for beforehand, though he never owned to himself that such was the case. The advisability of starting a branch establishment of their house farther South had been hinted at by the late manager, and the proposition had received Cecil's adhesion. It was a promising project in itself; but what had given it favour in his eyes was, that it would afford him an excuse for absenting himself from Wellborough, quite indefinitely; and then, instead of going south, he might go north-east — to Grantham. If the gods who wished to destroy him had made him mad, there had been, at least, much method in his madness. And now, growing more mad, he used more method. He employed an agent in town to take business chambers for him in Brant Street—where we have once seen him—that he might have a local habitation and a name in London to satisfy the inquiries of Rose's friends; and as for herself, he knew that she would believe all, without inquiry. He had given his second name to her (Henry) instead of his first, not by design, but by a sudden instinct; he did not choose her to call him "Cecil," as poor Ella did. But he used the name of Henry

now, as a precautionary measure. There might be many Henry Landons, but scarcely another Cecil. No matter what care he took to hide himself, he felt that there was risk for him every way; but there was no help for that. There would be danger, too, when the present risk was over, and he had gained his point in wedding Rose—for he no longer concealed from himself that such was his intention—but there was no help for that either. He would have taken all Rose's danger on himself, and, to give the devil his due, all poor Ella's ruin too, if that had been possible. If the consequences of sin could be limited to those who commit it, sin would be comparatively sinless—the sinner's "own look-out," as the phrase goes; but, unhappily, it involves others who cannot "look-out," and who are punished with him.

Cecil strove to forget this remorseful thought in action. Time was now become everything to him. He was well aware, if Rose became acquainted with his position, and, notwithstanding that he could have proved his first marriage illegal, not only to her own mind, but to the whole world, it would have availed him nothing. She would have had nothing to say to him, save "Farewell." Every moment, therefore, in which he was not making way with her was precious

time lost, and an opportunity for discovery. He repaired to his office, and wound up the clock of his affairs there, so that matters should go on without him as long as possible; and then started, nominally for the South upon a business tour, but in reality in another direction, and with a very different object—to Grantham. He had thrown dust in the eyes of his father, and of his own clerks; he knew that Ella's pride would prevent her becoming importunate, and that, for the present, he would be unmolested. He was neither in health nor spirits; but a certain wild excitement had possession of him; the last time he had travelled by that route he had been in a low fever; he was now in a high one.

On arriving at Grantham in the afternoon he went straight to the "Stranger's Rest" to deposit his portmanteau.

"What? Back so soon, sir!" cried the landlady, with whom such open-handed visitors as Cecil were rare; "we are main glad to see you. One of the young ladies from 'The Casket' has just gone by towards Pullham."

"Indeed," said Cecil, with an indifferent air, "which of them was it?"

"Well, I didn't see her face; but I think, as the vicar was alongside of her, it must ha' been Miss Helen."

The *naïveté* of this remark — the honest divine's attachment to the young lady in question being as well known in the village as his Christmas sermon—would, under other circumstances, have tickled Cecil; as it was, it only pleased him with the prospect of finding Rose at the cottage alone. He took his way thither at once, and boldly inquired of the servant if the young ladies were at home.

Miss Helen had gone on foot—she was a great walker—to Pullham, was the reply; but Miss Rose was in the garden. Etiquette was evidently not strictly observed at "The Casket," for the girl pointed quite naturally to the glass door which opened on to the lawn, and Cecil was not slow to take the hint.

Rose was sitting by the fountain with a book in her hand, which she was apparently conning with great attention; her back was turned to the cottage, so that she was not aware of Cecil's presence till he came quite close; then she sprang up with a little cry of pleasure and a pretty flush, and held out her hand. The next moment the flush deepened, and with her other hand she slipped away the little volume, but not before he had identified it with the pocket-book in which he had written his initials.

"I am so glad to see you can use your left arm," said he. "Is it quite well?"

"Quite well," returned she.

"I was afraid, from not getting a line from you, that it was at all events still unserviceable," observed Cecil.

It was cruel of him to reproach her thus in order to extort from her some gracious confession; but even the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.

"Well, the fact was, I—I mean we—that is, my sister—thought it better that she should write."

"So that you should not compromise yourself in any way," said Cecil, smiling, "with a total stranger, who might be anybody, or nobody, a penniless adventurer, eh? It was a very wise and prudent course. I was prudent myself last week when I ran away from Grantham without so much as wishing you good-bye. I cannot tell you how it pained me to do so. You must have thought it very strange."

"I—I was very sorry, of course," said Rose, stirring the daisies with her dainty foot; "but Helen understood you to say that you had good reasons for your departure."

"So I had, the best and worst of reasons.

There was an obstacle to my speaking certain words, that were always trembling on my lips, to you, Rose. That obstacle is now removed; and the words, which I am now free to utter, were, 'I love you.' "

Her eyes, that had been riveted on the grass, looked up for an instant into his tender, longing face, and then once again sought the ground.

"I have known you so very short a time," said she, softly, "though, it is true, under unusual circumstances—and, as Helen says, we are so utterly in the dark about you, Mr. Landon."

"You called me 'Henry' once," answered he, "when we were not so well acquainted. Why not call me 'Henry' now? Of course you are in the dark about me, Rose; and I am come back on purpose to throw light upon that subject—I hope not altogether an uninteresting one to you. I believe I shall have little difficulty in satisfying your sister as to my prospects and position; my doubt, my fear is lest I should fail with you—for, believe me, I am conscious of my own unworthiness."

His last words, at least, had the genuine ring of truth about them, and to Rose's ear so had they all. So far as she was concerned, he felt that he had already gained his point.

"I am so sorry—Henry," said Rose, presently—the dainty, hesitating way in which she called him by his christian-name was music to him—"that my sister is from home."

"I am not at all sorry," answered Cecil, laughing. "She is enjoying her walk, no doubt—as I am sure Mr. Welby is—and I am very happy here alone with you. Are not you happy also, dear?"

When the watch-dog did arrive—only a few minutes before dinner-time—the wolf was quite at ease in the fold, and secure of his position.

"Has Mr. Landon been long here?" inquired Helen, with feigned indifference, when the servant informed her of the arrival of the visitor.

"He has been here all the afternoon, miss."

Helen's heart, freighted with vague misgivings, and only certain of the event it had dreaded, sank within her.

"So you are come back, Mr. Landon?" said she, summoning up a smile to greet him.

"Yes, he is come back," put in Rose, triumphantly. "Did I not say he would?"

Those words alone—had Cecil needed such, which he did not—would have been a revelation

to him of her love. His wooing was over; but every step of the road he had to tread, before he could win her—whether it should be long or short—was set with pitfalls.

CHAPTER V.

REFLECTED HAPPINESS.

Months had now passed away since Ella had heard one word, save from Mr. Landon the elder, and that only of vague report, concerning Cecil. She felt his coldness and his silence, as some ship's company, shut up in the Arctic seas, feel the approach of voiceless winter. Every day the barrier between her and home was growing broader and more formidable; the parallel failed in this alone, that for her there was no certainty of spring, but, rather, the menace of eternal exile. She had remained at Woolwich — not, indeed, as the Commissary's guest, but contributing with her usual liberality to the common expenses—much longer than she had originally intended, not because she was happy there, but because her own house was hateful to her, and now it became necessary

that she should return to it. Her host had openly expressed his intention of marrying Miss de Horsingham, and though he did not propose to make her his wife at once, he made no secret of his purpose so to do, before that decent interval which society has imposed upon widowers who take to themselves a second spouse. She could no longer countenance by her presence the frequent visits of the lady thus openly proclaimed a bride elect; and she strove to persuade Gracie to accompany her, and leave her father's roof for hers. "I have nothing to offer you, darling, but my friendship and a home," said she, with pitiful pleading; "my heart is no longer mine to give, though he who won it from me values it at naught; just a few poor embers of love and goodwill are left for you to warm your hands at. Come, dear, for charity's sake, if not for love's, and bear me company."

But Gracie would not go.

"When my father marries, I will leave him, and if you are still in the same mind, Ella, will come to you, at all events for a little while, till I can gain some means of livelihood. I cannot eat the bread of idleness and dependence, even though it be your bread——"

"Great Heaven, what talk is this!" broke in

her friend, impatiently. "What is money, that it should weigh a feather's weight in life's balance? Even *I* have money—and look at me!"

The scorn and pathos of her words and tone were terrible.

"My darling, it was my dead mother's wish that I should do my duty here, till I was superseded by another," returned Gracie, quietly, "and I dare not disobey it."

There was pathos in poor Gracie's words also, and, as her friend perceived, an implacable resolution. So Ella went back to her stately house, so well provided in all things, save that which makes house home, and which being absent leaves it bare indeed; and Gracie stayed on at Woolwich. Their mutual affection continued as warm as ever, but their lives exhibited even a greater contrast than before. Ella, though well-nigh friendless, save for Gracie, had many to call her friends. She was still cut off indeed from a certain portion of her old acquaintances, the echoes of whose harsh judgments reached her from time to time; her husband's absence gave them fuel, and they heaped coals of fire on her, though they paid no good for ill. But in the eyes of many the very doubtfulness of her position gave her a certain *éclat*. Her beauty, too—dangerous passport—admitted her to circles

which were exclusive in their way. She was fêted, flattered, and caressed among them; and, like all "poor, pitiable women who have biographies," was quite the rage. One day a little comfort came to her among all this gilded misery. It was Gracie.

"My father is to be married to that woman at once," said she, "and I have kept my promise, Ella, and come to you."

It seemed to Ella that into the cold gray murk of her wintry sky a little blue had at last shown itself, and that, peradventure, it would abide there. But it was not so to be.

On the third day, when Gracie had gone out—she had not said "whither," though poor Ella's heart, alive to every presentiment of evil, foreboded that she was seeking for some place or employment that should tear from her, once more, this dear companion—a visitor called.

It was Hugh Darall.

Ella had not seen him since the days when she had revisited Woolwich in Cecil's company, and the sight of him tried her sorely. He asked after her husband, but not in his frank old fashion. He knew, of course, in common with all the world, that there was some shadow between them, and his manner was tender and, as it seemed to her, commiserating. He did

pity her, no doubt, though he meant only to show his sympathy, and she resented his pity.

"My husband was well the last time I heard of him," said she, coldly; and then went on at once to congratulate him upon his appointment on the survey.

"Thanks," said he; "it is that piece of good fortune, Mrs. Landon, in connection with something else that can be called by no such term, that brings me up to town—Miss Ray is now living with you, I hear—as your companion."

"Your informant is mistaken, Mr. Darall. Gracie does me the honour, and the great kindness, of staying with me for the present as my guest; that is all."

"You use gracious words where other people are not so delicate, Mrs. Landon," returned he, with emotion. "You had always a good heart."

"Had I?" answered Ella, with a bitter smile.

"Yes, and you have it still," continued Darall, earnestly. "It was from Gracie's father that I heard she had come to reside with you in the position of which I spoke."

"He is angry with her for having refused to sanction by her presence his marriage with Miss de Horsingham," explained Ella. "She has done quite right in coming to me."

"Of course," said Darall, quietly; "she is happy, however, in having such a friend—to come to. I am here, Mrs. Landon—for why should I conceal it?—to offer her a home—though it will be a very humble one—of her own."

"You are going to take her away from me, then?" said Ella, fiercely. "You wish to rob me of my last treasure." Then, reminded by Darall's astonished look that her anger was unintelligible to him, she burst into tears.

"Forgive me, Mr. Darall," sobbed she, "I am not well—not mistress of myself to-day."

"There is nothing to forgive, Mrs. Landon," said he, softly; "I ought indeed to feel in some sort complimented upon Gracie's account, since she has become so indispensable to you. But I trust that, in making her my own, I shall not deprive you of her friendship. She will be a soldier's wife, and it is only too likely that I may have to leave her—perhaps for years—when a friend like you will be invaluable to her. Besides, even at present, her home—where you will be always welcome—will be but a few hours' journey: it is near Pullham Junction, and what is to prevent your meeting?"

"What indeed?" sighed Ella. She was thinking of her husband, who, though Wellborough was not much farther off than Pullham,

found the distance, or affected to do so, so insuperable.

"My mother is already settled in that neighbourhood, at Grantham," continued Darall, "which is quite convenient so far as my work is concerned, and is, according to her account, a charming spot. I am going down thither, to-day, and if I am able to take with me dear Gracie's promise to be my wife, I shall be a happy man indeed."

"You deserve happiness, Mr. Darall; nay—though that is saying very much indeed—you even deserve Gracie. I have no doubt of what her answer will be to the question you have come to ask. It is said of very old people, that their happiness is derived from the contemplation of it in those they love. I am not old, but I hope—nay, I believe—that that much will be vouchsafed me with respect to Gracie."

The hopelessness, as regarded herself, that this speech implied was not lost upon her companion; but a sound caught his ear that at once monopolised his attention, and chased from his face, in spite of himself, its sympathetic sadness. It was Gracie's voice; and presently her step was heard passing by upstairs.

"Come in, my dear," said Ella, opening the door of the back drawing-room, so that Darall

in the front one was not immediately visible to her friend.

"I was told you had someone with you," said Gracie, simply.

"You should not believe everything that is told you."

"I should be very willing to disbelieve some things," said Gracie, wearily.

"What, you have been trying to find some excuse to get away from me, have you? A genteel family in want of a governess? I thought as much."

"Well, yes—I was not very particular about the gentility; but I have been told that I am 'a drug in the market,' which is not pleasant."

"I am sure you are a very wholesome drug, and agree with me to perfection," returned Ella, smiling. "Still, if you are really fixed on setting up on your own account, Gracie, I have heard—since I saw you last—of a situation which will just suit you."

"Oh Ella, are you serious? You don't know how I pine, notwithstanding all your kindness, to begin to do something for myself."

"I am quite serious, but unhappily the situation is in the country."

"I am sorry for that, dear Ella, as respects yourself; still—I never knew till to-day the full

meaning of the proverb, 'Beggars must not be choosers!'"

"Just so. The place is in a pretty district. You will meet, I can vouch for it, with every kindness there; and though the house, I hear, is but small, you will find it to be indeed a home. The terms are only moderate, but I think the offer a satisfactory one."

"I shall most gratefully accept it," said Gracie, fervently.

"I thought you would—— Mr. Darall, she accepts it."

It was rather wicked of Ella, but she made amends for her delinquency by instantly withdrawing from the apartment, and leaving Gracie in her new employer's arms.

CHAPTER VI.

A MOTHER'S DARLING.

We have now to accompany another traveller, upon the same line of rails that bore Cecil Landon and Rose Mytton to their destiny some six months ago. It is late autumn with external nature, but in the heart of Hugh Darall beats the eternal spring. He has parted from the girl he loves, but only for awhile, for he has her promise to be his bride in a few weeks. His heart is full of sweet and precious thoughts of her. Even the intervening time that lies between to-day and his marriage morn, is not without its own happiness. He is going to see his mother in her new home, which is presently to be also his and Gracie's. The old lady is devoted to him, and the tidings that he brings her will, he knows, be eagerly welcomed. Thanks to the good offices of Sir Hercules and his own merits, he has obtained

an appointment which, although very slenderly remunerated, will enable him, with his pay, to wed. His income, all told, will not even amount to that proverbial three hundred pounds a year, upon which everybody, who is anybody, knows that it is "madness" to marry.

Fortunately, Darall and Gracie were nobodies, to whom, therefore, that stringent rule of society did not apply. They were going to "risk it," and notwithstanding the danger of the experiment, very happy they both were in the prospect of so doing. It would certainly be a love-match, yet not altogether brought about by thoughtless passion. Circumstances, as we are aware, in the person of the Commissary—himself a somewhat too ardent swain—had precipitated it; and it had some sanction for Gracie at least in the confidence which her dead mother had always expressed in the object of her choice. Gracie had told him as much, and Darall had replied, "And when *my* mother comes to know you, darling, she will have confidence in *you*—with much more reason for it—and only wonder why I didn't run away with you, appointment or no appointment, when I got my commission." They had talked great rubbish together, in short, from which, please to take notice, we have quoted but that single extract.

There was no lovely damsel in distress for money for her railway ticket in Darall's case; he met with no "interesting" adventures—some philosophers would tell us because he was in no humour for them—but travelled in peace, and with pleasant dreams over his cigar in the smoking carriage, to his journey's end. He got out at Pullham, because he had to arrange some business there, and afterwards walked by a short cut of five miles across the fields to Grantham, whither his portmanteau had preceded him. The quiet beauty of the evening mingled with his own bright thoughts, and "made their round complete." It is not to the eye of the young and hopeful that the "happy autumn fields" bring the tears of divine despair; the memory of the days that are no more does not intrude upon them; they look before, not after, because their brightest days are in the store-house of the future, not the past. Beyond the last stile was the little inn with which we are acquainted, the "Stranger's Rest." And there Darall inquired for his mother's house, Wold-Cottage.

"You pass the rectory, sir, yonder, and then straight on till the second turning as leads to the moor; it's the only house there is after that," were the directions given to him.

But there were other houses to pass besides

the rectory; one a small, verandahed dwelling, called—as he afterwards came to know—"The Casket," from whence, though the lights were in the windows, he heard a pleasant sound of laughter from the hidden garden at its back. "Those are healthy folks," thought he, "who stay out to the last in the open-air." One pure laugh—it was Rose's—went to his very heart, for it reminded him of Gracie's mirth.

Wold Cottage, although so called from its proximity to the moor, was itself buried in trees, and would have been hard to find, but for the light it showed as he drew near—not at the window, but at the open door. There stood his mother, lamp in hand, which she had carried out from her little parlour at the first sound of his footstep. She had already given two wandering tramps the same fiery welcome, and they had cost her some alarm and a shilling; but here was her Hugh at last, in whose arrival all fear and mischances were forgotten. She was a little gray-haired woman, aged, but still vigorous, and with a bright look in her eyes—that the glad tears could not quench. For some time she was not very communicative, she uttered little else except, "My boy, my boy," which simple words, however, had a certain eloquence of their own, and occupied herself with an affectionate scrutiny

of his face and limbs. Then finding him safe and sound, and unchanged in all respects—which was in her eyes equivalent to perfection—she began to talk a little.

"You have brought your uniform with you this time, my darling, I do hope."

"No, indeed, mother, I have not," returned he, laughing; "one doesn't wear one's uniform on survey, you know."

This was the only ground of discontent the old lady had ever had with her beloved son. He would not visit her in uniform, and she had never seen him in anything more gorgeous than the attire of a gentleman-cadet. It was so cruel of him not to take her to church one day, accoutred with his sword and shako. Thus apparelled she felt sure he must look like an archangel.

"And how do you like your new house, mother?"

"It is perfect, dear, every way; only so much too big for you and me."

"Then it would hold another person, perhaps —another lady—if absolutely necessary? Eh?"

"Lor', Hugh, you don't say so! It's Gracie, of course!"

He nodded; and she threw her arms about his neck and blessed them both. She had been

prepared for this piece of intelligence ever since he had begun to mention Gracie in his letters—now more than a year ago. And though she had never said a word to him on the matter, had guessed what use he would make of his "Government post," as she called his modest appointment, should opportunity offer.

"And to think that I have never set eyes on your darling yet," said she, with a smile and a tear.

"I have her photograph in my pocket, mother; and you will see the original in a month or two."

To see her pore over Gracie's picture, and then compare it with Hugh's honest face, was as good as a play.

"I am sure I shall love her," said she. "And she's very pretty, very; but not quite pretty enough—that is, for you, dear."

"But she is quite pretty enough for me, I do assure you, mother; or for anybody else, for that matter."

"Oh, for anybody else, of course, Hugh; but —perhaps I'm partial——"

"Oh, I see. You mean that she is not so pretty as I am," cried Hugh, bursting into a roar of laughter. "Well, then, I do think you *are* just a little partial, mother."

The old lady shook her head as though in contradiction of this view; but we have reason to believe that her opinion was as her son had stated, and that it remained unshaken. Never was such a merry party of two—considering they were, in years, as June and January—as those two that evening. Mrs. Darall had sent her one little maid to bed, so that they could sit up and chat as long as they pleased without interruption.

After the subject of Gracie had been exhausted, which, however, took a very long time, we may be sure, and even included a mapping out of the cottage, in contemplation of the new arrangements, the old lady began to talk of her own affairs. The village was charming; "but as for the people, my dear, of course, I know nothing of them as yet; nor should even have cared to know, perhaps—that is in the way of society—but for this change in your plans, which will of course render it necessary. The clergyman, a Mr. Welby, has called upon me, and was very kind and sociable. He says I shall find a certain Miss Helen Mytton most delightful, which I suppose means that he is in love with her; men—that is, some men," added the old lady, hurriedly, "take every goose for a swan under those circumstances."

"I am afraid some mothers take the same view of their ganders," observed Hugh, slyly.

"I believe they do," answered the old lady, innocently; "and nothing is more ridiculous. How lovelily your moustache is getting on, my dear!"

"The gander's down," murmured Hugh; but she took no notice; her faith was of that exceptional kind which is not affected even by ridicule.

"It was very good of Gracie," she continued, "to let you come down to your old mother."

"Gracie always does what is right," returned Darall, simply. "Moreover, she is quite content to remain for the present where she is, thanks to the kindness of her friend Mrs. Landon."

"There's a Mrs. Landon here at Grantham, by-the-bye," remarked the old lady; "a sister of that Miss Helen Mytton the vicar raves about; she was only married the other day, and is now on her wedding-trip. I suppose the next bride at Grantham will be Gracie."

"Well, our wedding will take place in London, mother, since Gracie's hostess is so good as to wish her to be married from her house, and her own home is out of the question. But we shall soon return hither; as we shall not have much money to spend in touring."

"Mr. and Mrs. Landon make a short tour

too," observed the old lady, for whom marriages had always an interest—as they do have with all good women—and had just now a special attraction by reason of Hugh's engagement; "not because of a light purse, however, but because he has so much to do. He has to run all about the country, it seems, though the head-quarters of his business are in London."

Who has not experienced, from their dearest and nearest, and especially when they grow old, these uninteresting disquisitions upon young Mr. and Mrs. Jones, their neighbours, the narration of whose history makes us wish that happy pair dead, buried, and, above all, forgotten?

"It seems so curious," continued Mrs. Darall, "that you should have come down straight from your Mrs. Landon's house to a village like this, and find another Mrs. Landon."

"It is not a very uncommon name, mother," said Hugh, suppressing a yawn. "Is it not getting rather late?"

"Dear heart alive!" cried the old lady, consulting a venerable silver watch, "I daresay you are tired to death with your day's journey."

On the morrow Hugh was taken out for what his mother called "a trot," a word which had more significance, in an equine way, than she imagined; for no horsedealer was ever more

eager to trot out his four-legged property for the admiration of beholders, or would have been more eager to conceal its defects had any existed, than was this excellent old lady in the case of her son. As they passed by the Vicarage, Mr. Welby, who was at work in his garden, came out to greet Mrs. Darall and to claim an introduction to her soldier son.

He was very pleasant and cordial, and "you and your mother must come and dine with me next week, to meet our bride and bridegroom," were his parting words.

"Why does he call this Mrs. Landon 'our bride?' inquired Hugh, laughing; "will he use the possessive pronoun to Gracie also, I wonder?"

"Well, you see, he will be your clergyman, my dear," replied the old lady, to whom the church and all connected with it was a matter of sincere though somewhat mystic adoration.

"Oh, I see, it's a question of tithe," returned Hugh, gravely. "Then he will only claim a tenth of her after all?"

"I suppose so," said the old lady, simply. "But with respect to Mrs. Landon, he is very intimate with the family at 'The Casket;' that is the name of their house, and there it is. And, oh dear me! I suppose this is the famous Miss Helen."

It was indeed Helen herself, who, as they drew near the cottage, stepped out from the verandah and met them face to face.

She bowed, and held out her hand to the old lady. "I was about to do myself the pleasure of calling upon you, Mrs. Darall, this afternoon, and I must not pass you in the street without a word."

Then Hugh was introduced, and as their way lay in the same direction, the three walked on together quite socially. Mrs. Darall was a little nervous with strangers, but Helen's natural and gracious manner soon put her at her ease. When Helen spoke of the neighbourhood and its objects of interest, the old lady politely answered, "But you have left out your own house, 'The Casket,' Miss Mytton, which Mr. Welby tells me is the prettiest place of all."

"Oh, but the vicar is not to be credited on that point," said Helen, laughing. "He is always wild about our cottage, because, I suppose, he gave it its name. However, such as it is, I hope you will soon come and judge for yourself. My sister, Mrs. Landon, and her husband return on Saturday, after which we shall hope to see our friends, old and new."

"My son has a great friend of the name of

Landon," observed Mrs. Darall, looking towards Hugh.

"Oh, indeed," said Helen. "I don't think he can be related, however, unless very distantly; my brother-in-law has no near belongings."

"My friend's business is chiefly in town," observed Hugh; "though he has of late been much engaged in the country."

"Well, so far, there is a coincidence," smiled Helen. "My brother-in-law's head-quarters are in Brant Street."

"Ah, his namesake's are in Wethermill Street. It is curious, because I have heard Cecil's father say that there was no other house of business in London of the same name."

"Cecil!" said Helen, stopping short. "Did you say Cecil?"

"Yes; my friend's name is Cecil."

"Well, that is remarkable; for my brother-in-law's second name is also Cecil, though he is always called by his first name, Henry. Indeed, I should not have known that he had a second, had I not seen him sign it in the marriage register."

"I never heard of Hugh's Cecil having any second name," observed Mrs. Darall; "if he had, I should certainly have known it, for at one time—that was when he was a cadet at

Woolwich—the boy talked of nobody else; I used to get quite jealous of Mr. Cecil Landon."

"He was the brightest and the most agreeable, if not the cleverest fellow I ever knew," observed Darall, thoughtfully.

"But he does not treat his wife well," put in the old lady; "and so he is just now, very properly, in disgrace with Hugh."

"You should not say that, mother," observed Darall, gravely; "one is rarely in a position to hold the scales between man and wife."

"That is true," said Helen; "one knows so little about the real circumstances of anybody."

It was an observation less pertinent than she was wont to make; her manner was abstracted, and she spoke with an effort very unusual with her. In a few minutes she stopped at a labourer's cottage, and made a visit there the excuse for taking leave of her two companions.

"Now I call that a very nice young woman," observed Mrs. Darall. "Mr. Welby says she is always doing good to somebody, and that the parish would miss her, if she left it, a good deal more than it would the vicar himself."

"That's why he wants to make her the vicaress, I suppose, and so secure her to the parish," remarked Hugh, smiling.

"I daresay it is," answered the old lady. "He seems a very unselfish sort of a man; but, then, every young woman is not bound to fall in love, even with a clergyman, for parochial reasons, though she might have much worse. Do you know, my dear, I am rather sorry I didn't tell her you were engaged?"

"Good heavens, why?" inquired Hugh.

"Well, I think it was rather hard upon the vicar. He's not very good-looking, and not very young; and the contrast between you and him, my dear, could not fail to have struck her. Did you not notice how silent and thoughtful she seemed to grow all of a sudden; and yet she could not keep her eyes off you? That is very significant, in my opinion. I am sorry I did not tell her—of course in some indirect and delicate way—that you were engaged."

"Perhaps I had better carry a board to that effect, like the advertisers in the streets," observed Hugh, dryly. "I daresay we can get one with 'Engaged' upon it at the railway-station."

CHAPTER VII.

THE RECOGNITION.

Mrs. Darall had been right enough in her diagnosis of Helen's case so far as the symptoms were concerned; she had grown silent and thoughtful in Hugh's company, while her eyes had strayed in his direction in spite of herself; but the old lady's notion that all this was caused by love at first sight—that the girl had fallen a captive to her son's charms, was, to say the least of it, premature. Helen had scarcely bestowed a thought on Hugh, except so far as a possible connection between him and her brother-in-law, Henry Landon, was concerned; but that idea had been overwhelming. That the christian-name of two Mr. Landons should in each case be Cecil, was rather remarkable; that they should both have their head-quarters in town, though their business lay much in the country,

made the coincidence stronger; and these two circumstances, taken together, would have been quite sufficient to make Helen uneasy in her mind.

From the first moment she had made acquaintance with Landon, she had, as we have seen, mistrusted him; but when, contrary to her expectation, he had returned to Grantham, and given reasons, more or less plausible, for his change of purpose, Helen had endeavoured to persuade herself that jealousy upon her sister's account—the apprehension lest he should break up their happy little home—had set her against him. His account of his material position had satisfied Mr. Welby and the family lawyer, and even Helen herself was obliged to confess that the man was earnestly in love with Rose; that that was no passing fancy on his side, which was repaid with such blind confidence and devotion on the other. Under such conditions it was impossible to oppose the young people's union, and in due time—for it had been by no means what could be called "in haste"—they had been married. The interval had been marked by conduct on his part that was somewhat singular. Considering the independence of Mr. Landon's pecuniary position—which had itself been effected, according to

his own account, with unusual suddenness —his movements seemed to depend very much on other people. From the day of his engagement, he had established himself at the "Stranger's Rest," but he seemed liable to be called away from Grantham at a moment's notice. Even Rose observed of him that he was always "flying south" like Mr. Tennyson's swallow; and "the south" was generally the extent of the information vouchsafed to her as to where he was going. He had replied with such marked emphasis on one occasion "*not* Wellborough," when some one had inquired whether he was bound for that town, that it was understood he did not like being questioned as to whither business called him. It was not known, therefore, how often he went to London, though he certainly had been there once to get the special license by which he had insisted on being married. The vicar was greatly scandalised that his had not been done by banns in the usual manner; but so far Helen had agreed with Landon, since it had saved her sister the being stared at during "publication," by three Sunday congregations.

For the rest, Helen could not deny that her new brother-in-law was a very agreeable young fellow, though, for special reasons, he had failed

to make a pleasant impression upon herself. And here again was another source of uneasiness to her, in the account Mr. Darall had given of Landon's namesake. "He was the brightest and most agreeable, if not the cleverest fellow I ever knew," he had said; which would have been a fair account, in a friend's mouth, of Cecil himself. So far, and by itself, this might have been only another coincidence, albeit it was the third; but taken in connection with the sentence previously spoken by Mrs. Darall, "for at one time —that was when he was a cadet at Woolwich— the boy talked of nobody else," it had for Helen a terrible significance. Rose, who had laid up in her memory every word her lover had spoken to her, even at their first meeting, had told her sister that he had been educated "with some intention of being an engineer;" he was certainly a judge of drawing—though not in a very artistic way—and had often given Helen herself the benefit of his advice, which had been considerable, respecting her own calling. Up to this date, Helen had always concluded that the profession he had thus hinted at was that of civil engineering; but those simple words, "when he was a cadet at Woolwich," had opened a new door for suspicion, and thrown down at once all the slender barriers of comfort and security,

which she had striven to erect for herself as respected Rose. If Rose's husband, being, as he confessedly was, Cecil Landon, had also been a cadet at Woolwich, he must almost certainly be identical with Mr. Darall's friend, who was a married man. Of course, it was possible that her brother-in-law had not been at Woolwich, but the bare notion of it, with its appalling consequences, had so overwhelmed her, that she had taken the first opportunity of leaving her two companions, with whom she felt utterly unable to converse any longer. Her call at the labourer's cottage—though she was a constant visitor in such places—was a mere pretext for getting home, and considering this momentous matter in all its bearings.

Of Mrs. Darall's coming to Grantham Landon knew nothing; Hugh's appointment had not been conferred for some months after he had received the promise of it, and the Wold Cottage had not been taken by its new tenant until after Landon's wedding. Upon his return, therefore, he would unexpectedly meet his friend—if his friend he really were—face to face. The *éclaircissement*, if such there was to be, was immediately impending; and Helen, alone at "The Casket," had now to contemplate it, with what courage she could call to her aid. Courage she

had, and also a good store of common sense; but it is doubtful, with her passionate devotion for her sister, if even with these aids she could have faced the consequences of the impending catastrophe, had she not still entertained hopes that it would not take place. Her reason bade her prepare for the worst; but sentiment came to her relief. She could not bring herself quite to believe that any man could be so infamously wicked as this Landon must needs be, if her suspicions were indeed correct; above all, she could not think it possible that one so good and innocent as her darling Rose could be permitted by Providence to be the victim of such an infernal scheme as her imagination had conjured up. She would take counsel of no one; for what could be the use of counsel, if the thing she feared were true? And, if it were not true, how shocking was the imputation that she would thus have falsely made against the man whom her darling Rose loved above all men. If she told Mr. Welby, for example—and she had her reasons for not making him more of a confidant than necessary—what a revelation it would be to him of her real feeling towards her brother-in-law, for which, after all, there might be no just grounds! No; she must bear this burthen of suspense on her own shoulders, with

only a little hope to prevent it from being intolerable.

Had she dared to pay her promised visit that afternoon to the Wold Cottage, she might, indeed, have put an end to her suspense. One or two questions addressed directly to this Mr. Darall concerning his friend would, she was well convinced, have settled the matter one way or the other. But she did not dare to put them, lest it should be settled the wrong way, and doubt be ended by despair—for if her fears were justified, Rose was ruined.

So that day and the next "dragged their slow length along," and then came Saturday, on which the bridal pair were to return. Her sister, knowing how lonely Helen would feel, had written to her oftener than young women on their honeymoons generally find time to write, and her letters had been full of happiness. In her heart, it was clear, no doubt had arisen of the man with whom she had elected to share her lot in life. She spoke of him with rapture; but deplored the devotion to business which seemed to prevent "dearest Henry" from thoroughly enjoying anything, through anxiety lest matters should go wrong in his absence. "And yet, as you know, ours is an exceptionally short tour; and even the hardest-worked

of mortals—as I tell him—gets a holiday when he is married."

This information, written perhaps to "fill up" a sheet of note paper, now weighed like lead upon poor Helen's heart; for might not this "anxiety" be the worst of all anxieties—namely, that arising from the fear of detection? She thought it also suspicious that, notwithstanding the press of business thus hinted at, not a single letter had arrived at Grantham for her brother-in-law; to prevent which, he must either have taken unusual precautions, or informed no one of his whereabouts; indeed, the latter was almost certain, since the landlady of the "Stranger's Rest" had volunteered the statement that, "even when the gentleman was there, he never got no letters."

But when Rose came home at last, looking so happy and so beautiful, and her husband all smiles and pleasant talk, Helen almost forgot her fears. It could not—could not be, that he was a heartless villain, and that all her Rose's bliss was doomed to be destroyed, like a flower blighted by sudden frost. The vicar had angled for an invitation to meet the young people on that first evening of their return; not that he really cared to do so, but that he was pining to see Miss Helen, to whom, being alone at "The Casket," he

had not been able to pay his court as usual; but she had steadfastly refused the bait. Mr. Welby would have been almost certain to relate among his budget of news, that Mrs. Darall and her son had taken up their quarters in the village, and Helen did not wish her brother-in-law to be informed of that circumstance. With him, to be "forewarned," supposing him to be guilty, would be to be "forearmed," and he would be sure to make some excuse for not meeting the new-comers. At church, next day, both parties would be present, and she resolved carefully to watch for any sign of mutual recognition.

Mrs. Darall had been so far correct with respect to the impression made by her son on Helen, that it was a favourable one. She had judged him rightly to be frank, manly, and unused to the arts of deception; and if Landon were indeed his old friend and schoolmate, she felt sure that she should read as much in Darall's face.

Never had the little church at Grantham held a larger congregation than on the Sunday after the return of the bridal pair. Everybody who was on visiting terms at "The Casket" had brought their congratulations with them for presentation after service; all the others came to express the same, as far as it could be done,

by staring. Even the vicar on his way to the reading-desk, with cast-down eyes and folded palms, as is the orthodox manner, stole a glance of welcome towards "The Casket" pew with its three occupants.

It did but just hold three. Landon on the outside, looking very pleased and proud; Rose next to him; and then Helen, her eyes fixed anxiously on the whitewashed gallery opposite, in which were the two "sittings" that "went with" the Wold Cottage. Their tenants were a little late, through Mrs. Darall having insisted upon coming in pattens—articles in those days used commonly enough on muddy roads, to the advantage of the wearer as to cleanliness, but rather to her detriment in the way of speed. Darall looked in his hat for the usual half-minute, and then took a survey of the edifice, while the bassoon and other antediluvian instruments, which did duty for an organ in the humble sanctuary, gave forth their preliminary strains. Helen watched his eyes wander over the pulpit with its old-fashioned sounding-board; the Ten Commandments in the vulgar tongue that hung above her pew, with ten fire-buckets—like a commentary—below them; and then elsewhere, over the font, with the children of the village school sitting around it, and the school-

master with his long hazel wand, with which, throughout the service, he would flick the most distant of his refractory pupils, as a dexterous coachman "touches up" his leaders, or a skilful angler throws his fly. If Mrs. Darall had been given to staring about her in church, she would certainly have noticed how Helen's eyes followed her Hugh's, and drawn a wholly wrong conclusion. At last his roving glance is suddenly attracted—as a needle leaps to the loadstone and there sticks—to the bridegroom, who, unconscious of his scrutiny, is stroking his moustachios, and wondering whether the vicar will allude in his sermon to the marriage in Cana.

Helen sees incredulity, astonishment, horror, take each in turn their place upon Darall's countenance, which is henceforth fixed upon the other's, as a bird is fascinated by the serpent, albeit the serpent does not, as yet, look his way. He must needs do so, however, presently; and Helen now watches him solely. She will know well enough, by the expression in his face, when his recognition of Darall shall, in its turn, have taken place. Now the priest prays, and now the people, and now again all join together in praiseful harmony, but poor Helen can neither pray nor sing. Even when she kneels upon her hassock, her eyes shoot athwart her unconscious

sister—thanking Heaven, perhaps, at that very moment in her pure heart, for so good a husband—and are riveted on her brother-in-law. The thing happens at last, while the congregation are singing. Landon is weary, and has just covered his mouth to hide a yawn; this is fortunate, for, as his glance wanders to the gallery, his jaw drops as though he were a dead man. For one instant, his eyes strive to start out of his head, and then are turned upon his book. His face is as white as the face of the dead. "God help us!" murmurs Helen, with a devotion that not all the concentrated piety of the congregation could have approached; "God help us, for this is indeed the man!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BRIDEGROOM.

"WELL, Hugh, and what did you think of the bride?" inquired Mrs. Darall, as, steadied by her son's strong arm, she clattered on her pattens home from church.

"I scarcely looked her way," returned the young man, in grave preoccupied tones.

"Well, of course, not during the service, but did you not notice afterwards how everybody was pressing about the porch to speak to her? She is perfectly lovely, and looks so simple and innocent. She is a blonde, however, which it seems is not your taste. Bless me, what a difference it makes to a young man when he has once made his choice; he has no eyes for anybody else, has he?"

"At all events he ought not to have, mother!"

"Well, of course not; though I shouldn't have seen any harm in your admiring Mrs. Landon. Her husband is a fine handsome young gentleman, only very pale, and, as it seemed to me, not so happy-looking as a bridegroom should be."

"I see I must be careful to look my best, mother, when I get married, since you are inclined to be so critical."

It was very difficult for Hugh to carry on this conversation, slight as it was, or even to catch the meaning of what his mother said. His thoughts were monopolised by the monstrous fact that he had just seen Cecil Landon—the husband of his Gracie's friend, with another woman by his side—his bride. There was no possible escape from this terrible complication. Cecil had not a twin brother, nor, if he had, would he have betrayed so miserable an embarrassment as just now had been visible in this man's face, when it had met his own. This, then, was the explanation of Cecil's continuous absence from his wife and home; he had committed bigamy!

Such was the simple fashion in which Hugh's thoughts arranged themselves; but the indignation of his soul was none the less that he indulged himself in no mental objurgations.

Darall's character was eminently just, and at that moment he thought less of his friend and of his crime, than of the consequences which it must needs entail upon the innocent. He would have stuck to his friend in trouble "closer than a brother;" nay, he would stick to him, perhaps, under punishment for his crime; but now, while his friend was, as it were, triumphing in his villainy, his sympathy was given wholly to those whom he had wronged. He had wronged Ella, shamefully, cruelly, for one; but he had wronged this second girl infinitely worse. Darall had noticed Rose—though, as he had said, he had scarcely looked her way, his attention being so taken up with Cecil—and agreed with his mother that she was pretty, simple, and innocent; but to do him justice, he needed not her good looks to recommend her to his pity. His heart bled for her, while it flamed with indignation against Cecil. The man that had been his friend was, he acknowledged to himself, a villain and a traitor. For the present it did not even seem to him that there was any mitigation of his offence in the fact that he was also in some sort a madman. For who but a madman could suppose that a crime of this sort could escape discovery? It had been found out to-day, as it happened, by him, Hugh Darall; but if not, it would have

been found out to-morrow by somebody else. And now it was found out, what duty devolved upon him, the discoverer?

Some philosophers aver that we are all conscious of what is the right thing to be done in any case, whatever may be the urgency of our reasons for not doing it; but in this case Darall really did not know what to do, and far less, as the phrase goes, to do "for the best," since action in any direction must needs end in ruin. Moreover, to remain passive was only to defer the catastrophe. And what would be thought of him when it did occur, and it should turn out that he was aware of Cecil's crime, but "had not thought it worth while"—as was observed by an important witness in a certain famous murder case—"to mention it?" Unfortunately, Hugh had little or no sense of humour, so that the comicality of this quandary did not at all mitigate the horror of it.

Of one thing, amid all his shifting thoughts and fears, he felt assured—namely, that Landon would seek the very first opportunity of speaking with him in private and endeavouring to keep his mouth shut. Promptness of that kind was natural to the man; and as Darall remembered that, and how deception had once been as alien to him as suspense was hateful, he could not but reflect upon the incongruity of Landon's

crime with the man's character. He must have been drunk with misplaced love indeed to have risked so much—and above all, so long—for its gratification. Hugh, however, was not one of those maudlin sentimentalists who consider drunkenness excuses crime.

He said to himself, "This man is a villain, and I shall tell him so."

He had not long to wait for the opportunity. After their early dinner, to which, to his mother's great trouble, he could do but little justice, Hugh endeavoured to calm the fever of his mind by tobacco. He might as well have tried to stop a cannon-ball with his hat; but the occupation gave him some excuse for silence, and while his mother talked, he glanced occasionally in the direction of the cottage-gate, and, before he had replenished his pipe a second time, he saw Cecil pass by—alone.

"Why, surely, that was Mr. Landon!" exclaimed the old lady.

"Very likely," replied her son, with an indifferent air. "He is probably taking a constitutional, and, if you will excuse me, I think I shall do the same."

"But you will be back in time for afternoon church, Hugh?"

"Perhaps, mother; I am not sure."

There was a gravity in the young man's tone that forbad discussion upon that topic. He did not attach that supreme importance to going twice to church upon a Sunday that it had in his mother's eyes; but then, on the other hand, thought she, he was so good that he didn't require it so much as other people.

When Darall got into the road he saw Landon dawdling up the hill, and felt that it was his intention to be overtaken, albeit he did not know that the other had passed the cottage twice before he caught sight of him. When Hugh came quite close, Cecil turned round with an "Hullo, old fellow!" and held his hand out. But Darall kept his hands in his pockets.

"Who on earth would have thought of seeing *you* here?" continued Cecil, with affected gaiety; and the perturbation of his mind could hardly have shown itself more distinctly than by such an ill-judged speech.

"Nay," returned Darall, quickly, "who would have thought of seeing *you?* May I ask if that young lady, by whose side you stood in church this morning, is aware that you are a married man?"

"My dear Darall," stammered the other, "I am aware that in your eyes I must appear in a most anomalous position——"

"I don't know about anomalous," interrupted Hugh, scornfully; "you appear to me to be a most infernal scoundrel."

For an instant it seemed as though Landon would have made short work of what life was left to their friendship by a blow, but he restrained himself.

"You should not use such words as those to me, Darall, without grave reason—without being sure, I mean, that I have deserved them."

"Since you have persuaded Miss Mytton to marry you, you must deserve them. You have acted a base and cowardly lie, and you deserve all you will get for it."

"And what is that?"

"Penal servitude."

Cecil, who was ghastly pale before, turned to a leaden hue, and laughed a laugh that was worse to listen to than his face was to look at.

"You think I have committed bigamy, I suppose?" he said.

Then it struck Darall that, perhaps, Landon was not really married to Rose; that she understood his real position (for he had read of such infatuation in women), and was content to deceive her friends; his mother, it is true, had led him to believe that Rose had been married at Grantham, in which case there

could have been no deception; but in this, as it had been hearsay, she might have been mistaken.

"It is possible," said Darall, coldly, "that you may have so arranged matters as to save your own skin; but whether you have sacrificed this girl to your pleasure, or allowed her to sacrifice herself, your position is the same in the eyes of every honest man—and it is infamous."

"It appears to me, Darall, that you have lost your old love of justice, thus to condemn a man—and your old friend, too—unheard."

"I am ready to hear what you have to say for yourself," replied Hugh, in icy tones.

"Listen then: you know, I daresay, that I have been living for some time apart from—from Ella."

"I know that you have quarrelled with your wife."

"Ah, there is your mistake. I quarrelled with her because she was not my wife."

"What?"

"There, you see, you have taken too much for granted. I was never married to Ella, though I thought I was. She deceived me at the altar by using a feigned name, which invalidated the ceremony."

"And does she know that?"

Landon hung his head and poked the ground with the end of his walking-stick. "No; it is true that I have been wrong there. I had not the moral courage to tell her. I confess that I have been a coward."

"You are paying yourself a compliment in saying so," answered Darall; the memory of poor Ella's recent kindness, and of the love that Gracie had told him her friend still entertained for this lost wretch, kindling his heart with rage. "I daresay you have also hidden from your second wife the story of your first."

"I have," said Cecil, in despairing tones. "Call me any name you please."

Here Landon, although unconsciously, was playing his best cards. Darall was touched, in spite of himself, by the humiliation and wretchedness of the man that had been once his friend.

"And what is it you mean to do," inquired he, in softened tones, "as respects Ella?"

"Heaven knows—if heaven has anything to do with such a man as I," replied Landon, bitterly. "I will do anything—everything—that is possible. Reparation is out of my power. I cannot remarry Ella; I cannot un-

marry Rose. What a villain you must think me?"

"It is impossible to think otherwise, Landon."

"Still, if you had known my position, Darall; how hateful my first union had become to me, and how deep and genuine was my love for Rose——"

"That is all lies and wicked rubbish," broke in Hugh, impatiently. "You have nothing to say for yourself except, 'I am a scoundrel.'"

"And has my old friend nothing else to say for me? Oh, Darall, for the sake of the old times, have mercy on me."

"It is not of me you should ask mercy. What is it you would have me do?"

"Nothing—that is all I ask of you. Do not expose me. Give me yet a little time, and I will confess my sin—my crime, if you will—to both these women. You have not told your mother that it was I you saw in church this morning."

"No; I have become for your sake a liar like yourself. I will give you twelve hours to make your peace—if it be possible—with those whom you have wronged."

"Give me twenty-four, Hugh. To-morrow we have promised to join the vicar on some

excursion. I cannot tell Rose till we return. Give me twenty-four hours."

"I will do that; and, in the meantime, let me see no more of you."

Darall turned upon his heel and began to retrace his steps; the church bell was giving its last call to afternoon service, and he knew that he should have an hour or so to think over this wretched matter at home—alone. As he expected, his mother had gone to church, but no sooner had he lit his pipe in the dining-room, than there came a knock at the front door.

"Missus is out," he heard the servant girl reply to the visitor; but the next moment she entered the room with a young lady at her heels.

It was Helen Mytton.

"My mother is at church," he began confusedly.

"I know it, Mr. Darall," was the calm reply. "I am come to have a few words with you alone. Do not put out your pipe, I am used to tobacco; and I am here, as you may judge, upon no visit of ceremony."

He bowed, and handed her a chair. He knew what she had come about at once, and his heart died within him.

"You have just parted from my brother-in-law, I believe," said she, very quietly, but with evident effort.

"Yes, I have been talking with him for a few minutes on the road."

"You find that he is no stranger, but your old friend, Cecil Landon."

"Yes."

There was a moment's pause; she had expected that reply, of course, but it moved her, nevertheless. He had put down his pipe at once, notwithstanding her protest, but she seemed to suffer from want of air, and he threw back the window.

"Forgive me, if I seem weak and foolish," said she, gently. "My whole happiness—my life itself—is bound up with that of my sister; and she must be my excuse for all. What I am come to ask for is the truth—however terrible it may be. You will not deceive me, Mr. Darall."

"I will not," said he, nor did he intend to do so. His promise to Cecil had reference only to any voluntary statement upon his part. He would be no party to further fraud. And as for exposure, his refusal to answer Helen's questions would be equivalent to full confession. Nevertheless, he did add, "At the same time, Miss Mytton, I must needs say that, for this day and

to-morrow at least, I have passed my word to say nothing that I can avoid saying to your brother-in-law's prejudice."

"That one word, 'brother-in-law,' Mr. Darall, keeps alive the only hope I have still left. If you can confirm it, I shall owe you an endless debt of gratitude. Is Henry Landon, in law as well as in the sight of God, my sister's husband?"

"I do believe, madam, upon my honour, that he is."

"And yet, but the day before yesterday, I heard you speak of Cecil Landon—that is, of this same man—as being a married man!"

"I did speak of him as such, because I believed him to be so. I knew the lady; as pure and good a woman"—for Helen's lip had curled—"let me add, in justice to her, as your sister herself. But Landon now tells me that there was some informality in his first marriage, which renders it null and void; and that in the eye of the law he was a bachelor."

"But so false a wretch will say anything."

"I am not defending Cecil Landon, Miss Mytton; he has, in my opinion, no defence; but I feel sure he was not lying to me in this instance. When he married your sister he was—in the law's sight—free to marry her."

"Thank Heaven for that," murmured Helen. "He has disgraced himself alone; not her—— You sigh, Mr. Darall. Is there more bad news to come?"

"No, madam; no more—or at least no worse —as respects your sister."

He was thinking of Ella, upon whom disgrace and ruin would fall for certain. Helen's self-congratulation, natural though it was, offended him.

"You have taken a heavy load off my heart, Mr. Darall, although much remains. Is it too much to ask of you—a stranger, and also this man's friend—to advise me in this matter? I feel unequal to the burden of this frightful secret; yet to tell it, prematurely, may be to make matters even worse. Perhaps after to-morrow—you said 'after to-morrow' you would be free to speak—I might take counsel with you? I have no right, of course, to ask it; but you seem kind and true, and I have no helper."

"I feel for you, and pity your sad strait, Miss Mytton," returned Darall, gravely. "If help of mine can avail you or yours, you shall have it; but I warn you that in the evil days which must needs be close at hand, I shall have other interests to defend than those of your unhappy sister."

"Is it possible, then, that this man—in calling whom your friend, a few moments back, I felt that I had done you wrong—still possesses your sympathies, Mr. Darall? and that in case his interests, forsooth, should seem antagonistic to those of his injured wife, that you will act to her disadvantage?"

"I did not say that, madam, nor did I mean to imply so much, though the friendship that has withered away retains some dearness still. I was not alluding to your brother-in-law; but to another whose position is even more pitable than that of your sister."

"You are speaking of the woman who——"

"I am speaking of the lady, madam," put in Hugh, quietly, "who, at this moment, believes herself to be Cecil Landon's wife as firmly as does your sister, and whom someone will have to undeceive; a task which rather than undertake, I, for one, would have this hand cut off. Forgive me, Miss Mytton, if I appear to you a partisan. I have no part or lot in the matter, nor may I be called upon to so much as say one word in it; but if it must be said, rest assured it shall not be to your sister's detriment."

"I thank you with all my heart," said Helen, rising from her chair. "You are just, it seems,

as well as kind; and since my sister's cause is that of justice, you will be its champion."

He shook his head.

"Well, at all events, you have been a friend to me, and I am deeply your debtor."

He answered only with a grave sad smile, and they shook hands in silence.

"If my sister had chosen a man like this," thought Helen, with a bitter sigh, "her happiness would have been in safe keeping."

CHAPTER IX.

THE MEETING IN THE LOCK.

The circumstances which interfered, and, as Landon weakly imagined, fortunately interfered, with the immediate confession of his position, was a certain water excursion organised by the vicar, in the special honour of the newly-married couple, and to which Rose was looking forward with childish expectation. It was to take place on the Thames, a river with whose beauties she was wholly unacquainted, and involved a journey by railway of considerable length. To Helen, the notion of taking part in any amusement under such circumstances was simply ghastly and repulsive; but she could hardly absent herself, save upon some plea of indisposition, which would have been certain to keep Rose at home or to spoil her pleasure. To Cecil it was a day of reprieve,

which to some minds, at least, is preferable to the one of execution. His mind was too much preoccupied by the consideration of how events would shape themselves, when his confession should have been made, to note how Helen shrank from him; he was thinking of Ella's passion, her love for him changed to hate, and her quick thoughts bent upon revenge; he knew her well—the more shame to him for so treating her—and could calculate the force with which such a blow would strike her, and the effects it would produce. She would move heaven and earth to right herself in the world's eyes, and get him punished. She would invoke the law for certain, and when that failed, as he was well assured it would fail, she might even try other means of vengeance. She was not one to sit down quiet under so cruel an injury. He did not think it impossible that in her wild rage she might even play the Eleanor to his fair Rosamond. Then he pictured to himself his Rose's anguish, with all the pillars of domestic peace in ruins about her; and his heart sank within him. His punishment had indeed begun.

It was so far fortunate that, in consideration of the excursion having been planned in Rose's honour, the vicar, for once, paid her peculiar

attention, and left Helen in Cecil's charge; otherwise Rose must needs have noticed her husband's gloomy looks and absent air. To Helen, who guessed the cause only too well, his silence during the railway journey was welcome, since it permitted her to think her own sad thoughts without molestation. At the river-side, however, the vicar had prepared some compensation for himself. Instead of a large boat for the accommodation of the party, he had bespoken two skiffs, in which they were to row some miles down the stream, and dine at a certain house of entertainment. It would never do, he said, to separate bride and bridegroom; so Helen was to go with him, and Rose with her husband. Under other circumstances, Cecil would have accepted this arrangement willingly enough; he much preferred his wife's company to that of her sister, of whom he entertained an intuitive dread, which did not, however, prevent him from slyly bantering her on the subject of the vicar's devotion. On this occasion, however, he was in no mood for banter; but took the place assigned to him without a word.

He was a good oarsman, but the sculls felt in his hand like lead, as he pulled out from shore. Rose, on the contrary, was full of spirits. She

had never been on the water with him before, or seen him in the boating-dress which became him so admirably. The wooded reach, down which they sped so swiftly, delighted her with its unaccustomed charms. The changing leaf from its fiery red to soberest brown, walled them in on both sides with its varied tapestry; above them was the autumn sky with its isles of fleecy cloud. Hamlet and hall, church and mill, the sounding lasher and the echoing lock, were feasts to her eye and ear; and when her glance, surfeited with the gorgeous panorama, sought some more quiet bliss, it rested on her husband.

"How soft and soothing is the very motion of the boat, and all these sights and sounds," said she to Cecil. "It seems almost a sin to talk."

"That is not everybody's feeling," answered he, smiling. "Listen."

He poised the oars upon the rowlocks and let the skiff glide on, when, instantly, a far-off sound of talk and laughter broke upon their ears.

"There is a merry party on ahead. What is it, Rose?"

Rose, of course, was looking forward, and he the other way; a bend of the river had hitherto concealed these persons from her view, but now she caught sight of them.

"There is a large pleasure-boat full of people," said she. "And it has six oars. What a pace they go!"

"I think we can catch them, however, before they reach the lock," observed Cecil, looking round.

"Welby, can you spurt," cried he, to the vicar, whose skiff was but a few yards behind them.

"Try me," answered the other, with a slight ring of boastfulness in his tone.

He was not so young as Landon, but, in the case of the oar, youth gives no great superiority; and in his college-days the vicar had cloven the waters of that very river with no little credit to himself and his college-club. That "Try me" in fact was the acceptance of a challenge, and no sooner had the words been uttered than both skiffs began to fly. For the sense of speed and the delight that accompanies it, there is nothing like "spurting"—to the steerer; and Rose was in the seventh heaven of happiness.

"The boat ahead has quickened its stroke," cried she, clapping her hands with glee. "We are going to have a race with *them* too."

In the way of emulation—else so many husbands would not be ruined—the female is even more greedy of triumph than the male.

A six-oared boat, with four ladies in it under an awning, has commonly but a small chance, even with a start, against a skiff, with one lady and no awning, rowed by a powerful oarsman; but in the present case the six were picked men—young gentlemen from London, whose home in summer was on the river, and whose hearts were there even when the claims of the law, the public service, or of their relations, called them elsewhere. On this occasion, in presence of their ladies, these cavaliers acquitted themselves to admiration; and Rose beheld the awning raised and more than one fair flushed face look forth, to mark the progress of the pursuers. As for Cecil, he was "putting his back into it," and saw nothing but his own knees.

The three boats reached the lock-gates, opened wide for their reception, almost at the same instant; and then, of course, the respective athletes ignored the existence of their rivals, and looked—or, rather tried to look, for they were hot, breathless, and "pumped out"—as though there had been no race at all. The six-oared boat took one side of the lock, and the skiffs—that of Landon being in advance of the vicar—the other; the men holding by the chains as the waters sank. If the gentlemen

ignored one another, however, the ladies made up for it, by scanning each other very narrowly; not a feature of Rose's or Helen's, not a brooch nor a bow, nor a stray lock of their hair, escaped the notice of the tenants of the awning; and though the two sisters were less curious in their behaviour, it is probable they could have made out a pretty exact inventory of their late rivals' apparel after the first half-second.

One lady of the four especially attracted Rose's attention. She was of dark, indeed, almost Spanish, complexion, and of great beauty; her dress, though a little too handsome for the occasion, was in excellent taste. But it was neither her personal charms nor her apparel which riveted Rose's gaze; but the way in which she stared at Rose's husband. Just as Helen had seen them in Darall's face at church the preceding day, so now Rose marked Incredulity, Astonishment, Horror, arise in this woman's, and finally uncontrollable Passion—the rage of the tigress. Landon, as I have said, was busy with his lengthening chain and with keeping the frail boat away from the wet wall, and observed nothing of this, until presently a voice rang through the echoing lock, startling every ear, and chilling him to the very marrow—"Cecil!"

He turned his face—a moment before aglow

with toil, but now aghast with fear—and met Ella's piercing eyes.

"Cecil!"

She had repeated his name, but still he answered nothing. His tongue clove to the roof of his mouth; his despairing eyes sought the dark waters, as though beneath them alone were to be found release and escape. Yet he was somehow conscious—perhaps he saw her reflection in the stream—that Ella was standing up and pointing to Rose.

"Cecil! Who is that woman?"

Then with a sharp pain he looked up at Rose. Pale as a river lily, she sat confronting Ella, and in a firm, quiet voice replied:

"I am his wife, madam."

"His wife? Then who am I? I speak to *you*, sir."

Cecil was well aware she spoke to him. He also knew that the lock-gates were opening behind him, and giving, as it seemed, a glimpse of light and life. Up to that time he had felt like a rat in a hole, but without the pluck of the rat. Now there was freedom—for the moment at least—before him; he thrust the skiff from the wall, plunged his sculls into the water, and shot out into the sunlight like an arrow from a bow. No confession of defeat and guilt could

have been more complete; and poor Rose fell back in her seat—which was fortunately fenced round, as usual, like an arm-chair—and fainted away.

The air and her quick motion through it, however, revived her, and she presently came to herself, though only with a dim consciousness of what had happened.

Cecil, on the other hand, had by that time summoned all his wits about him, and met her wondering glance with an affectionate smile.

"You are better now, darling, are you not? I am so deeply sorry for what has happened!"

"What has happened?" sighed she; then with a deep flush, she added, "ah! that woman! I remember now. She called you 'Cecil'—said she was your wife."

"Yes, dear; she did. But it was all untrue."

"All?"

"Well, no; not all, of course, love. I have behaved very ill; but that was before I knew you, Rose."

It was curious, considering the base subterfuges to which he had already sunk, that Cecil thus shrank from saying anything to Ella's disparagement. To do him justice, it was quite as much remorse as fear that had kept him silent under her questioning in the lock. When she

had cried out to him, on Rose's saying that she was his wife, "Then who am *I*, sir?" he had not had the heart—that is to say, he had lacked the brutality as well as the courage—to deny the tie between them. Rose's simplicity and ignorance of the world were such that she had, hitherto, believed that no image of another woman had ever occupied the place of her own in her husband's breast. She had believed it to be a sort of sanctuary, which had remained pure and void until he saw her, and set her up in it as its idol. But now that she perceived this had not been the case, she at once grasped the fact that men in general are far from being immaculate. It was out of the question that her husband should be an exception, save upon the side of virtue; it was evident, therefore, that he had given way to vice under a great temptation. She was not angry with him, as some women would have been, for taking all the blame upon himself, and saying nothing against his seducer; but she was by no means more inclined upon that account to take a charitable view of the young person in the six-oared galley. Her impudence had certainly been beyond all belief; but then young persons of that description must necessarily be impudent; nor was she even without

a suspicion that poor Ella was intoxicated. Perhaps what annoyed Rose most was the fact that this unfortunate and amazing *rencontre* had taken place in the presence of her sister and Mr. Welby.

Neither spoke again till they drew near a pretty river-side inn, about a mile below the lock. Then Cecil mildly said :

"We are to get out here, love."

"Why ?" cried Rose, with a little shudder, and a half-glance behind her.

She would have preferred him to row on at the same rate for ten miles an hour for an indefinite time, so as to distance that six-oared galley, with the young person in it who called her husband "Cecil," altogether.

"We are to dine here, darling," said he, persuasively.

"Dine !" she echoed, not scornfully, but with the air of one who never looks to enjoy dinner again. Perhaps, thought she, the occupants of that galley were about to dine there also, a notion that made her shiver.

However, she got out, and they were ushered into the sitting-room that had been prepared for them. It looked on to the river, of course, which was itself an element of horror ; and in a minute or two the measured stroke of the

six-oared boat was heard as it came down the stream.

Rose, seated on the sofa, as far from the window as possible, grew once more deadly pale; she had take up some illustrated newspaper to hide her face from the waiter, and Cecil noticed how it trembled in her hand. Then his eyes turned to the mirror above the mantelpiece; the brightly-painted boat, with its gay-coloured awning, which happily hid those beneath it, crossed its surface like a glittering pageant seen in a magic glass—for him full of baleful menace—and passed away in a breath.

Landon drew a deep sigh of relief.

"Has it gone by?" asked Rose, in a tremulous whisper.

"Yes, dearest; it has gone by."

Then came the beat of sculls; and in the mirror Cecil saw pale Helen, and the vicar with troubled brow. It was, above all things, necessary that he should make his peace with Rose before those others came.

"Can you not forgive me, darling?" he whispered tenderly.

"I *have* forgiven you," she answered. "Let us forget it. Never let us speak of it more."

He kissed her, but said nothing; his heart misgave him that that last wish was vain indeed

—that this evil day was but the beginning of troubles. But it was something to have obtained her pardon.

The next moment their two companions entered the room.

CHAPTER X.

ARRESTED.

Only a mile or so, as I have said, had intervened between the lock and the inn, but during that interval much had passed between Helen and the vicar. The former had at once identified Ella with the person whom Darall had described to her as having been deserted by Landon.

The latter regarded the *rencontre*—making allowance for the difference of his sex—in the same light as Rose; that is, as a most wretched and embarrassing scandal. The flight of Landon from the presence of her to whom he had manifestly been "something less than kin and more than kind," had struck him at the moment as dastardly and contemptible; yet on reflection, as he allowed, what could the poor man do, thus confronted with such an enemy and impeded for all purposes of showing fight by the companion-

ship of Rose? The whole affair was simply one of those unavoidable disgraces which attach to past misbehaviour, and that unhappily punish others besides the real delinquent.

A very high degree of satisfaction had doubtless been imparted by the scene to its less interested witnesses, the ladies and gentlemen on board the six-oar—which the vicar looked upon as a sort of Cleopatra's galley, Youth at the prow, and Pleasure (in the form of License) under the awning—the lock-keeper and his family, and a couple of roughs who happened to be on the towing-path; but to himself it had given unmitigated distress of mind. Unhappily, too, now that it was over, it was utterly impossible to ignore it; Helen and he could scarcely paddle on together and join the fugitives at the inn without a word of remark upon such an occurrence. He let the hateful galley draw well away from them, however—which it did in silence, except for the sweep of its oar-blades, not a word nor a laugh breaking from one of its inmates—before he opened his lips; while Helen remained silent too, looking unutterably pained and wretched.

"We must not make more of this miserable adventure than is necessary," observed he, soothingly. "We know nothing of the circumstances; the woman who spoke to your brother-in-law in

that manner may be mad, for what we know, as most certainly what she suggested was untrue."

"She did not appear to me like a woman who was speaking an untruth," answered Helen, gravely.

"Good heavens! do you mean it is possible that she could have been his wife?" inquired the vicar, poising on his oars in horrified astonishment.

"I mean that she seemed to me to believe what she said, Mr. Welby. I believe she believes that she *is* his wife."

"Oh, pray don't say that, Miss Helen," pleaded the vicar, "because you are almost always right. And if you should turn out to be right in this case—I mean if there was really any ground for such a mistake on her part, it would argue—don't you see—duplicity and wrong on that of your brother-in-law towards her."

"I take both for granted," answered she, coldly.

"Oh, Miss Helen, this is too terrible! I am well acquainted, of course, with your feelings towards Landon; you have never liked him"—she shook her head—"or, rather, you have always been suspicious of him"—she nodded—"and, therefore, I am compelled to accept your opinion with an unaccustomed reserve. I think this

condemnation of your brother-in-law unheard, upon an unsupported charge brought against him in the way we have just witnessed, is really most unjustifiable, unless you are acquainted with other facts."

She interrupted him with an icy look.

"I am unhappily acquainted with such facts; I have heard enough from the lips of his friend, Mr. Darall, to make me fear that much—very much—of trouble may ensue to us—to Rose—from—from yonder woman."

"How should Mr. Darall know?"

"He has known Mr. Landon from his boyhood, it seems; but that is a long story. We shall have to listen to it, and much else, I fear, before long. In the meantime what presses is, to put the best face on the matter as respects dear Rose. If she knew even so much as I know, it is my deliberate conviction that she would pine and fade and die, Mr. Welby."

"God forbid!" answered the vicar.

"Amen and amen!" said Helen, covering her face with reverent hands. When she looked up again it was very set and still, and full of purpose. "For the present, Mr. Welby, I will strive to say a few words of comfort to poor Rose; it will not be difficult, since she has confidence where I have none; and you, for your

part, must take in hand this man. Upon the first opportunity, you will find out from him how matters really stand—he will lie, no doubt; but Mr. Darall will check his statements, and, when we know our true position, we shall better know how to act. That action will be necessary, I am certain."

Here they reached the inn, where, as they anticipated, they found Landon and Rose awaiting them. Helen took away her sister under pretence of taking off their bonnets and cloaks, and the vicar was left alone with Cecil.

"What has happened to-day, Mr. Landon," commenced the former, stiffly, "will have to be inquired into——"

"By those who have the right to do so," put in the other, quickly.

"As Mrs. Landon's intimate friend, who, moreover, gave her away to you at the altar, I consider I have such a right, sir, and I mean to exert it."

The vicar, though he prostrated himself so readily under the wheels of Juggernaut, in the person of his female divinity, was not to be bullied by any one of his own sex. Cecil saw that he had mistaken his man, and altered his tone at once.

"I had forgotten that you had so grave

a claim upon me," said he, quietly; "I have already, however, explained my former position, as respects the lady who addressed me in the lock, to Mrs. Landon. It was a humiliation, of course; but I have confessed my weakness and have been forgiven."

"Still, I must needs ask you—indeed, in this I am but the mouthpiece of your sister-in-law—does that lady of whom you speak believe herself to be your lawful wife?"

Cecil hesitated; but presently replied:

"It is possible that she may believe it; but, of course, it is not the case."

"Some form of marriage, then, has been gone through between you?"

"We were married in church in the usual way; but the ceremony was invalid."

"You are positively certain of that?"

"I am."

"Then when you married Rose, you had not the courage to inform this—other person—of the fact."

"I did not inform her."

The vicar moved away to the other side of the room.

"I have not got the plague, sir," cried Landon, angrily, for that movement was very significant, and the more so that it was evidently

involuntary. "You are a clergyman, but you have not always been a saint, I suppose?"

"No, but I hope I have always been a gentleman."

Here the sisters came in, looking very grave and quiet; and then the whilom little pleasure-party sat down to dinner—or, rather, at the dinner-table. The meal was a mere stage banquet to all except the vicar, who possessed the excellent appetite of his cloth, and had his gentler emotions too well under control to suffer them to interfere with digestion. It was not quite the same with his temper. Cruelty and cowardice, especially when united, always excited in him the utmost indignation; but he was sorry that he had suffered this base and heartless fellow—as he judged Landon to be—to strike sparks of fire from him. It was important to keep on seeming good terms with him, since they must needs have much to do with one another. It was easy enough, however, for the vicar to effect a reconciliation. Landon could afford to quarrel with nobody, and had not as yet reached that pitch of recklessness at which a man delights in quarrel.

The party were very silent for the rest of the day; but some little talk was attempted, and especially between the two men. When they

got back home, and the ladies had retired to their rooms, Mr. Welby resumed the conversation which had been broken off so summarily in the hotel-parlour.

"Whatever may be my opinion of your conduct, Mr. Landon, I am bound by very dear ties to be your partisan. And I beg you will be open with me, as respects all, at least, that may concern your wife. Do you apprehend that there will be any trouble for us with regard——" He hesitated, being at a loss for a proper word, that should also express his disapprobation, to describe poor Ella; but Cecil understood him well enough.

"Frankly, then, Mr. Welby, I do apprehend it."

"Would it not be better to offer the lady terms; although in that you must, of course, be very cautious?"

Landon shook his head, and smiled a sickly smile.

"No; but I have made up my mind to write to my father!"

"Your father! why, we did not know you had a father!"

"I am like other people, however, in that respect," answered Cecil, gloomily. "It will be better that he should explain matters."

"What, to—— the lady?" exclaimed the vicar, in astonishment. "Then this illegal marriage of yours had actually your father's sanction?"

"He did not know it was illegal; nor did I until lately."

"And she does not know it now?"

"I have told you that already," said Cecil, sulkily. "It is no use crying over spilt milk. I am very sorry and very much ashamed of myself, and there's an end of it. What can I say more?"

"You can say nothing more, indeed; but I am afraid this is not the end of it," returned the vicar, naïvely.

"At all events it is not our place to move in the matter."

"That is true," mused the vicar; "if there be any action, it will originate from the other side."

"I tell you any action is out of the question," exclaimed Cecil, irritably, and not quite catching what the other said. "They have no ground to stand upon, far less to move."

"You have taken counsel's opinion on the matter, I suppose?"

"Yes, I have," said Cecil, thinking of his conversation at the inn of Wellborough with

the man of law. The vicar nodded approval; but it was confined to the fact, and not the sentiment. Every word that Landon uttered made him appear more base and vile in the other's eyes.

"Well, we must keep quiet, and hope for the best," said Mr. Welby, rising. "It is growing late, so I will wish you Good-night, Mr. Landon."

He so contrived his leave-taking, however, by dexterous manipulation of his hat and stick, as to avoid shaking hands.

"Phew!" said he, as he found himself alone in the open air, "the atmosphere about that man is absolutely poisonous." He looked back at the pleasant cottage, now bathed in the pale moonbeams, with a sigh. "How vile a serpent is this to have crept into so fair an Eden! Helen, as usual, was right about him from the first. A most ineffable scoundrel! I suppose he is really safe—that is, that his poor wife is—so far as the law is concerned. And yet there is no believing such a liar. It is but ten o'clock; I will just walk down to the Wold Cottage and see if I can have a word or two with this Mr. Darall."

Darall, though an early man both night and morning, was still up, smoking his last pipe after his mother's departure for what that old-

fashioned dame was wont to call "Bedfordshire." Her solitary retainer had also retired to rest, so Hugh opened the door to the vicar with his own hands. There was something in the other's face that would have forewarned him of the nature of his errand, even had not his first words been these:

"You must excuse this untimely visit, Mr. Darall, but I am come about Mr. Landon's affairs. There is no further need, I am sorry to say, for any reticence on your part with regard to your friend's interests, because Rose and that—that unfortunate person—have met, face to face."

"What! Is Mrs. Landon here then?"

"Mrs. Landon is here, of course, at her own home," answered the vicar, coldly. "The other lady—has, I believe, returned to town."

"God help them both!" ejaculated Hugh, fervently. "Come in, sir, and sit down." The morning light was breaking before the two men had parted, and the vicar took his way through the silent village home. He had in his vocation witnessed many a melancholy scene, with death itself occupying the foreground; but it seemed to him that, until now, he had never known how terrible and tragic are the elements of human life. When once a real catastrophe happens to

us, it appears, for the time at least, that we have been heretofore living in a Fool's Paradise; we are like some Alpine traveller who, walking on the snow that looks so smooth and sure and solid, is suddenly engulfed in a crevasse; he may escape, but there is no surety for him more; his path is henceforth full of unseen crevasses. It was to the vicar's credit that he experienced these emotions, since no catastrophe had occurred to himself. The misfortunes of his friends, however, were to this worthy divine as his own misfortunes; and, in Rose's case, he had now learnt, almost for certain, that trouble was but beginning; that "the clouds" would "return after the rain" of yesterday, and were already forming somewhere, black and bulging, to burst in tempest on her innocent head.

Yet Darall and he had both agreed that there was nothing to be done; and, above all, since Landon had made his peace with Rose, that she should be left at peace, so long as it might be possible. And in this the vicar found—which settled the matter as far as he was concerned—that Helen concurred. So of all the little party at Grantham who had any knowledge of Ella's existence, as Cecil's whilom wife, poor Rose, who was the most deeply interested in the matter, knew least about it, and feared least what might

come of it. I do not say that she thought least concerning it; her simple heart, amazed that such things could be, doubtless, pondered over the weakness of the man whom she had seated with the angels, and did her best to gloss the soil away that marred the whiteness of his wings; but of personal apprehension she had none. He had sworn to her that she alone was his lawful wife, and she alone had won his love; and though he had erred in one matter, being cast more in mortal mould than she had fondly imagined, he was still to her truth itself; and she believed him.

On the third day, however, from that sad scene upon the river, there came to "The Casket" a taxed-cart, with two men in it; one of whom was known to the vicar, who happened most fortunately to be standing at the cottage-door as they drove up. They were policemen, though of the rural sort, and they had a warrant with them for the apprehension of one Henry Cecil Landon upon the grave charge of bigamy. The magistrates, at that moment in petty sessions at Pullham, were urgent for his immediate attendance before them.

"You know me, my man," said the vicar, gravely. "There is no need to enter: I will bring the gentleman to you."

Under pretence of a morning walk he got Cecil away from the two women and told him what had happened.

"It is nothing," remarked Landon, with a crooked smile, "or, at least, nothing more than I anticipated. It is merely a last effort of revenge and spite. Such a warrant ought never to have been signed by any man."

"It has been issued, however, upon sworn information," observed Mr. Welby, dryly: "that of one Colonel Gerard Juxon of the Royal Horse Artillery."

Then the crooked smile faded from Cecil's face, and a ghastly paleness crept over it. He was not afraid of the Colonel individually; but his prompt action in the matter convinced him that it was not only to be a duel to the death between him and Ella, but a general engagement from which Rose herself would be unable to keep aloof.

"What would you have me do?" he asked, in a husky voice.

"I will drive you over to Pullham in the dog-cart," said the vicar; "and if the worst comes to the worst—if you are committed for trial—then I will be your bail. We shall be home by dinner-time, and, for the present at least, neither of the ladies need be any wiser."

So they walked off to the Vicarage, the taxed-cart following them at an interval too close to be called "respectful," and presently started for Pullham in the vicar's "trap," with the taxed-cart behind it like its shadow.

CHAPTER XI.

THE COMMISSARY AND HIS BRIDE.

It will be some relief to turn for a little from two homes, the domestic peace of both of which is threatened, to a roof beneath which young love —or at all events recent love—hovers above a presumedly happy pair. I refer to the good Commissary and the second Mrs. Ray—just returned from a mere swallow-flight of a wedding-tour to their home at Woolwich. Their marriage had taken place almost immediately after Gracie's departure, and much within the prohibited degree of time as respected the first Mrs. Ray's death; but both their minds were of that stout fibre which is independent of public opinion. It was also generally understood that they both possessed an independence of a description much superior to any mental endowment; for the bridegroom had always been very frugal in his mode of life

and had an eye to the main chance, which was not likely to be dazzled by mere beauty and accomplishments. Miss de Horsingham's constantly-repeated assertion, that she loved to watch the expansion of those human flowerets, her pupil's minds, beneath the sun of learning—or, in other words, teaching for its own sake—had therefore really obtained a sort of credence; and she was believed to possess not a little property of her own, in spite of her denial of that agreeable impeachment. She had told the Commissary, indeed, almost in so many words, that if he took her for his wife, her charms would be her only dower; and he had replied—with the items of that will in Doctors' Commons fresh in his recollection—that he preferred those charms to all the riches of Golconda.

In spite of this thorough mutual understanding, I am compelled, as an honest biographer, to confess that, short as their honeymoon had been, it had not been all sweetness. This arose, in the first place, from the fact that the bride despised the bridegroom in her secret heart to an extent that produced absolute loathing; and, secondly, that matters did not turn out with respect to money as either of them had anticipated.

The excellent Commissary had shown such extreme prudence with respect to expenditure of

coin, even upon his wedding-tour, that his Rosanna had called it "shabby;" and the remedy he had himself suggested had not been taken in good part.

"If you want two horses instead of one, my dear, to draw us, or a quart bottle of champagne, instead of a pint, between us at dinner," he had ventured to observe, "that can be managed very easily, and I must be allowed to add, very rationally, by your contributing one horse and one pint."

She had given him no reply at the time, save a glance of scorn; but afterwards when they got home, explanations became necessary, and out of them grew a very considerable "unpleasantness," which is the American term for civil war. Rosanna could not understand how money was so difficult to obtain from him for the housekeeping, the mere exigencies of life, and, in queenly contemptuous manner, demanded more funds. She could not believe but that the frugal Commissary had ample store in some old stocking or another; indeed, she had married him upon that very supposition, whereas he had in truth but little beyond his pay, and had married her to better matters. It was now become necessary for him to tap that ten thousand pounds of the existence of which he had taken such trouble to assure

himself; and the occasion seemed a favourable one. The fact was that Gracie had written to her offended father, not indeed an apology for her conduct, for she saw no need of that; but words at least of dutifulness and conciliation. She had also entreated him, in view of his new wife's returning home and perhaps destroying such fond relics, to send her certain articles of small intrinsic value but of inestimable worth to her, that had belonged to her dead mother.

"She shall have none of them," had been the Commissary's sullen reply to this appeal; but Mrs. Ray No. Two, being a kind-hearted creature in the main—warped though she was by circumstances—had suggested a reconsideration of the matter.

"It will not hurt us to part with these things, Mr. Ray; and the poor girl has nothing, it seems, in the way of remembrance of her mother."

"She might have had them all, had she done her duty and remained at home. She flew in my face in leaving this roof, and, again, in engaging herself, as I understand she has done, to this penniless young scoundrel, Darall. She deserves nothing at my hands; but if you ask it, Rosanna, as a favour to yourself, I will grant her request."

For an instant the majestic Rosanna looked very unlike a lady who is asking a favour; but the frown on the brow and the curl of the lip smoothed themselves away, and she replied:

"Well, Mr. Ray, I do ask it."

He nodded, and she at once set to work to wrap up the articles Gracie had indicated in little parcels—silver-paper within and brown-paper without—in that neat-handed way which, though so common among women, is unattainable by almost all men who are not counter-jumpers. There could not surely be a better opportunity, he thought, for breaking ground with her about that ten thousand pounds.

"You were speaking of money matters this morning, my dear," said he, plunging at once into his subject, "and I think it is high time we should understand one another with respect to ways and means. Our dinner to the Colonel this evening must be our last piece of extravagance."

She looked up with a surprised air from a parcel she was tying with string, but immediately resumed her occupation without a word.

"You seem to imagine," he continued, "that we live too frugally, by contrast, I suppose, to my way of life before marriage. The fact is, that at that time you put me to very considerable expenses, and I certainly do not intend to

persevere in giving entertainments which have now become unnecessary. I have neither the wish to do so, nor—what will have more weight with you, I suspect—the means, I do assure you."

There was a significant, and unaccustomed air about him as he spoke, that convinced her that for once he was telling the simple truth.

"Is it possible, then, that you have not saved money?" inquired she, gravely.

"I never had any to save, madam," he answered, not, I am sorry to add, without a malicious grin. "However, with my pay and the interest of your own fortune, which is not settled upon you, I believe, we shall, doubtless, get on well enough."

If he intended to imply a threat, it was lost upon her; it was not fear, but anger, that shook her voice as she replied:

"Do you mean to say, then, Mr. Ray, that you have wilfully deceived me with respect to your pecuniary position?"

"'In love and war——' my dear madam, you know the proverb," said the Commissary, pleasantly. He could afford to be good-humoured, for he felt that he had the whip-hand of this woman every way, and he had no scruples about using the whip. "If I am not quite so well off

as I represented myself to be, the artifice should be excusable in your eyes, since it was made use of to secure you. It is unnecessary at this time of day to repeat how I adored you; but I was a practical man, and, in addition to your beauty and intelligence, I was not unaware that you possessed what—so long as you remained a single woman — would have been an independence; but which, in the eye of the law, is now your husband's."

"Oh, I see!" said she, with a strange smile; "you have been to Doctors' Commons."

"Well—yes, my dear; I confess that I did take that little precaution. I also gathered from your conversation that you had never speculated and had been always prudent in your expenditure; so that your ten thousand pounds cannot have been spent. You will now oblige me, perhaps, by telling me where it is invested."

"In the air, in the moon, in the clouds," replied she, coldly, but with a certain tone of humiliation, too, which did not escape him. "I do not possess one penny of it."

The Commissary smiled, or rather showed his teeth like a hyena.

"I do not think you understand, madam, the man you have married," said he, with an ominous snarl. "It will be better for you to make

no mistake about the matter. When I say, 'I wish,' to my wife, it means 'I will;' and when I say 'I will'——"

"Well, sir?" for he had hesitated.

"Nay; I then use no more words about it, madam, for, if my wife has any sense, the thing is done. When an oyster does not open to my knife—that is in the smooth and quiet way that is so pleasant for both parties—I use any means; I have, understand, no sort of scruple in getting that oyster open. This ten thousand pounds of yours, or some of it, I mean to have, and the tighter you hold it the more unpleasant it will be for you. I would advise you not to push me to extremities."

"Miserable man!" said the other, slowly, "I do not hold your threats at that," and she snapped her fingers; "but I am almost sorry for you. You have overreached yourself through greed, and will, no doubt, repent it bitterly. I, too, have done the like, it seems, and I accept my punishment, for it is just; but you, who are a mere wild beast of prey, will howl and lash yourself to frenzy. Listen to me! I had a father once to whom the world was that oyster of which you speak, and he failed to open it. There was this difference, indeed, that his regret on that account was for another's sake—his daughter's—

rather than his own ; and when he died in seeming affluence, but, in truth, almost a beggar, he sought to benefit me at the expense of others. By this will, it is true, he bequeathed me ten thousand pounds ; but the money he left behind little more than sufficed to pay the legacy duty upon that amount. It was his hope that some rich greedy fool would seek to assure himself of his daughter's wealth, as you have done, and share with me, not it, but his own fortune. It was a fraud, of course, though to such as you it needs not an excuse, and I was fraudulent to—even tacitly—take advantage of it. Still I never led you on by hint or——"

"Stop!" cried the other, almost inarticulate with fury, and with his large bony face sicklied o'er with that hue of yellowish green which was so dangerous a symptom with him. "If you are telling lies—if you wish to keep your money for yourself, and are inventing this, beware, madam. If you value your life——"

"I do not, sir," interrupted she, coldly. "I hold it, if that were possible, more cheaply than your own. I have told you the plain truth, and if you doubt me, you can have corroboration of it."

"Put that down!" he roared, pointing to the parcel she was tying up with hands that neither paused nor trembled.

"Why?"

"Never dare to ask me 'why' again, you white-skinned thief! Enough that I say 'do it.' Do you hear?"

He sprang at her like a tiger—one of that old and mangey sort that is called "man-eater," and then sprang back again with even greater agility.

She had stood her ground; but, with a quick movement of her hand, had plucked from her bosom a small drawing-room pistol, and presented it point-blank at his hungry face.

"If you had touched me," she said, "you would have been a dead man—or dog—by this time. If you ever dare to touch me—in anger or on pretence of fondness, no matter which—your life shall pay for it! You cur! and coward!"

Here she did the Commissary wrong. He was not a coward in the mere physical sense, but he set a fancy value upon what was intrinsically worthless, namely, his own existence, which would unquestionably have come to an end, had he not made such good use of his legs. Not Beppo, upon his return from foreign parts and alien food, could have looked half so yellow.

At that moment the knock of their expected guest, the Colonel, was heard at the front door.

The duties of hospitality were never, perhaps, demanded from a newly-married pair under more embarrassing circumstances; but it was necessary, nevertheless, that they should be discharged. Back went Rosanna's pistol—quite a toy to look at, but more dangerous even than our present steam-engines for the nursery—into her bosom, as quickly as it had emerged; while the Commissary, in his extreme confusion, took up one of the show-books from the mother-of-pearl table. It was a foolish act; for never within mortal memory had he been seen occupied with literature before, and it would have excited the suspicions of a far less acute observer than the Colonel.

"Poems, by the living jingo!" was, in fact, the observation that this abnormal incident drew from the visitor's lips, as he entered the room. "Mrs. Ray, I congratulate you, indeed. I never thought that even your gracious teaching would have made a student of poetry out of the Commissary."

If he had said "a silk purse out of a sow's ear," the subject of this observation could not have looked less gratified.

"I was just looking into the book," he stammered, "to settle the question of a disputed passage with Mrs. Ray."

"Then there ought to have been no dispute about it, sir," answered the Colonel, gallantly; "you should have given in to your wife at once, independently of her being right about it, which I will wager that she was."

At this the Commissary grunted, by no means in approval, while his bride smiled in a grave and Juno-like manner.

"There has been a row," reflected the Colonel, "and not, I guess, about a mere quotation. She has hit out from the shoulder, as I knew she would, and damaged him pretty considerably. He looks all sorts of colours.—May I ask what is in these neat little parcels, Mrs. Ray? If it's bride-cake, I'll take my share of it home in my pocket,"

"No, no; we had no rubbish of that kind," put in the Commissary, with irritation. "Besides, it's out of fashion, like sending cards, and all that."

"So you have become a creature of fashion as well as a child of song," answered the Colonel, "have you? Then all is transformation indeed, and this is the fairy who has done it."

The fairy—who must have weighed fourteen stone—laughed a silvery laugh, as she finished her last parcel.

"These are all for Gracie," said she; "little

relics of her old home-life, which Mr. Ray is sending her. She is going to be married next month, you know."

"Well done, sir," exclaimed the Colonel, slapping the Commissary's unyielding shoulders; "I am very glad to hear you have come round and forgiven your girl. She has chosen a right good fellow, in my opinion; and I only wish my poor Ella had made as wise a choice."

"Yes; that's a precious bad business, I'm afraid," observed the Commissary, maliciously. "They say Landon will never go back to her."

"Well that isn't the worst thing that can happen to some wives," growled the Colonel; "sometimes the husband comes back when she don't want him, or, worse still, doesn't go away at all."

The fair Rosanna laughed again, even more pleasantly than before.

"How absurd you are, Colonel!" she said; but it was evidently pleasant to her to see her husband discomfited.

They were dining by daylight—"quite *en famille*," as the hostess said, or "without their war paint," as her guest described the not having to dress for dinner—and as they sat at table they could see into the barrack-square. As the conversation languished greatly—Mrs. Ray thinking

doubtless, of what her husband might have in his bosom; and the Commissary thinking of what his wife had certainly got in hers, namely, the pocket-pistol—this outlook was advantageous, as it offered topics for conversation. Presently the Colonel's servant was seen coming towards the house.

"There is news for you, I think," observed the hostess. "Whatever it is, I hope it will not rob us of your company."

"I hope not indeed," observed her husband; and they were both speaking the truth, no doubt.

"No, madam; not even the kitchen chimney being on fire would affect me," said the Colonel, who prided himself on his bachelorhood, chiefly because it kept him out of harm's way—beyond the reach of Fate's malice. "I'll wager my fellow has brought my snuff-box, not knowing that I put the tortoiseshell one into my pocket instead of the other."

"He has a letter in his hand," said the keen-eyed hostess.

"Nobody ever writes to me, madam, thank Heaven." He rose, however, and threw up the window with a "Hi! what is it, sirrah?—'Gad, it's from Ella!"

Its envelope was marked "Immediate," and

no sooner had he glanced at its contents than he uttered a furious execration.

"What's the matter?" inquired the Commissary.

"Matter! everything's the matter! I'll have his blood!"

He was out of the room and out of the house in half a minute, and then across the barrack-square, a spectacle that neither friend nor enemy had ever before beheld — Colonel Gerard Juxon was seen to run!

CHAPTER XII.

IRREPARABLE.

It had not been in company with Gracie that Ella had joined that fatal water-party and met her Cecil—for he was still hers by force of law, she knew, if not by that of love—within the lock's dark walls. Gracie had made excuse to stop at home, which her hostess had accepted without remonstrance. She understood too well that such miscellaneous entertainments, whether on land or water, of the semi-fashionable semi-Bohemian kind, had no charms for her simple friend, as, indeed, they had not for herself; but only offered excitement and oblivion. Her companions were mere acquaintances, such as she could number by the hundred, who had bespoken her presence long beforehand, indeed, before Gracie had taken shelter beneath her roof. And, since the thing must needs have

happened, it was better so. It had been easier for her to bear the brunt of that dread encounter among comparative strangers, than it would have been with that faithful friend by her side, to understand and grieve for it all. We have most of us felt the same, though, let us hope, under less distressing circumstances. If there must be a social catastrophe, say we all, let it fall upon us when there is no one by to share the sorrow or the shame with us. And Ella, but for that little touch of melodrama, which, after all, was natural enough—"His wife? Then who am *I*?"—had borne herself like a gentlewoman through that terrible scene, and given no cause for ridicule to those about her. Nay, her very earnestness and passion had impressed them, as it had Helen, with the conviction that she was speaking truth. They had heard, we may be sure, that there was something amiss—"shakey" was the word used for it by the gentlemen—about her marriage with Cecil. The doubt about it had added, perhaps, to her attraction in their eyes; but they now no longer doubted that she, at least, believed herself to be his lawful wife. It is even probable that they felt compassion for her while they remained in her company, though it was not easy, and would, perhaps, have been dangerous to express it. It

is a difficult matter to sympathise with a tigress robbed of her young; and poor Ella's feelings were not very dissimilar to that of the tigress. Outraged, betrayed, insulted, and abandoned as she was, it was neither wretchedness nor despair that took possession of her soul, but Fury. Her love for her husband was swept away in the current of a passionate indignation against him; the idea of righting herself in the eyes of the world—powerful though it was—was lost sight of in her desire for vengeance. If the woman that was with him had told the truth—if he, indeed, had married her, he should pay the extremest penalty that the law could inflict upon him—imprisonment, transportation, death itself, were too small a punishment for such a villain.

On the first opportunity she had left her company—glad enough, doubtless, to be rid of her and eager to discuss the great sensation of the day with freedom—and took the train for London. Gracie hardly knew her friend when she arrived at home, so terrible was the change that wrath and undeserved shame had wrought in her. A few words told her all, and overwhelmed her with their horror; counsel for the moment was wanting to her as much as comfort, but Ella had no need of counsel. She sat down at once and penned the letter to her uncle, which

called him, as we have seen, so abruptly from the Commissary's table. It was despatched by special messenger, and the Colonel obeyed the summons on the instant. He had the sagacity to call, upon his way, on his legal adviser, Mr. Vance—the same he had consulted about Ella's marriage—and to bring that gentleman with him. His presence was fortunate in another respect, beside that of the knowledge and advice he brought to bear upon the matter in hand, since it imposed some restraint upon his clients. The Juxon blood was up with both of them, and though the Colonel breathed nothing less than fire and slaughter—garnished with expressions that carried the war into another world—the lawyer noted that the lady was the more resolutely vindictive of the two. He had no shadow of doubt that vengeance, to almost any extent, was in her power, supposing that Cecil had really married another woman; but of this fact he did doubt, since his experience led him to believe, contrary to the opinion of some less matter-of-fact philosophers, that madness is the exception in mankind, and not the rule. If Landon had really married again, trusting to the supposed flaw in the first ceremony, consequent on his wife's deception, he must, so the lawyer thought, have been stark staring mad. The Colonel had

put the case to him, in the first instance, as in nowise connected with himself, and as a *fait accompli*; he would never have ventured to advise a marriage under such circumstances; but he was quite convinced of its legality even before he had taken counsel's opinion, which had confirmed that view. No lawyer could have decided otherwise, and no man, as he concluded, would have ventured on the step Cecil was said to have taken without consulting a lawyer. Therefore Cecil had not married again: Q. E. D.

"You are mistaken, Mr. Vance," said Ella, slowly. It was necessary for her so to speak; if she once lost the mere mechanical mastery of her tongue, it seemed to her that it would begin inarticulately to rage and riot, just as one reins with care some evil-tempered horse, whom the touch of the whip, or even the sense of motion itself, would transform into a demon. "This man has taken the woman I saw with him in the boat to be his wife."

"I'll have his blood whether he has or not," put in the Colonel, parenthetically.

Mr. Vance shook his white head in mild disagreement with the one, in mild remonstrance with the other. He was a quiet student of the law; but had studied human nature too, so far as it had reference to legal matters; he had seen

many a client "with a temper," but all his angry clients together had not, he thought, looked half so dangerous as these two now before him; and the woman, for all her studied calmness, so much worse than the man, for all his fire. The interview would have dwelt long in his remembrance even if it had not been fated to be engraved there by subsequent circumstances.

"What is to be done first and foremost, madam," said he, "is to decide whether you or I are right as to this second marriage. Some competent and trustworthy person must be sent down to discover the whereabouts——"

"They stopped at 'The Dolphin,'" interrupted Ella; "I saw their boat as we passed by afterwards. The people at the inn will know where this man came from."

"Quite right, madam; then our messenger must go there first, and afterwards to their parish church to examine the register. Then, if he finds them married, he will have to swear an information before a magistrate."

"And then this man will be put in prison," said Ella, eagerly.

"Well, not necessarily, my dear madam. In the first place there will be a warrant, or perhaps only a summons issued, and he will have to appear at petty sessions, but may be admitted to bail."

"Upon what grounds?" inquired she, with sudden fierceness; "they will know him to be guilty, though not as I know him. Why bail?"

"It is the course of law, madam. All offences are bailable save treason and——"

"Which this man has committed," she broke in passionately; "he is a traitor doubly dyed."

"Still he has not compassed the death of Her Majesty the Queen," observed the lawyer, with a half-smile. "Our proceedings must be reasonable, madam, though as prompt and energetic as you please. Simple as the matter may appear to you, it is not really so; though Mr. Landon should have transgressed the law, he will use every advantage that the law affords him to defend himself. If you are bent on his prosecution—which, I say again, is in my opinion most injudicious, since it is not you, but the other lady——"

"You are wasting time, Mr. Vance," interrupted Ella, imperiously. "You would move a mountain from its place more easily than me from my purpose. If justice is to be had, I mean to have it—ay, and vengeance too."

Here Mr. Vance made the reflection to himself that he had never seen a handsome woman

look so what the vulgar call "ugly," as did Mrs. Cecil Landon at the present moment. He had read, in highly-respectable histories of the French Revolution, descriptions of furious women who somehow reminded him of this beautiful client of his.

"My dear madam," said he, quietly, "justice is dear, but vengeance (according to my experience) is ruinously expensive."

"I care nothing—nothing—for the cost, sir," answered she, impatiently. "Let everything be done without regard to it, and at once; let there not be one hour's delay."

"My dear madam, our messenger shall be despatched to-morrow morning; I propose to send my own confidential clerk——"

"No; I will go myself, and to-night," put in the Colonel, decisively.

Ella moved quickly to his side, and kissed him without a word.

"Such an envoy will be indeed invaluable," observed the lawyer, approvingly. "You were a witness to your niece's marriage, and your position will secure a hearing with the Great Unpaid. But remember, before you move a step, you must make sure of the second marriage."

So along the same line of rails that had borne Landon to his guilty love, sped by the mail-train

that night his Nemesis in the person of Colonel Gerard Juxon; and not unlike a Nemesis he looked.

Gracie had not been present at the consultation. She was but too well aware, from Ella's state of mind, that it could have but one ending; her own feelings of loathing and contempt for Cecil were scarcely less intense than those of her friend; for was she not almost a wife herself? But in projects of punishment and vengeance her gentle spirit could play no part. To her some comfort arrived next day in those dear memorials of her mother, which she had hardly ventured to hope would have been granted to her. She felt grateful to her father—for she little guessed to whom she was indebted for them—and well pleased to think, though he sent no word of forgiveness, that he could not be so implacable as he had appeared upon the subject of her marriage. If they were not a peace-offering, they certainly gave a promise of peace, and her future, to her dutiful eyes, looked all the brighter for it.

Her only sorrow was on her friend's account; but it was deep and grave indeed, and well might be so. For poor Ella, it seemed that life as well as love was over, that there was no future for her, but only a thick darkness, lit up for the

moment by the lurid light of Vengeance, but presently to close again around her, perhaps with yet one evil element more wrapped within its murky folds—Remorse.

CHAPTER XIII.

A FRUITLESS APPEAL.

But a week has gone since that council of three described in our last chapter; yet something has come out of its deliberations that has had more or less of effect—from that of overwhelming horror, down through intermediate degrees, to mere idle surprise—on every person mentioned in this history. Cecil Henry Landon, of Grantham, Southernshire, and also—alas! — of Wethermill Street, City, and Curzon Street, Mayfair, has been committed for trial at the next assizes at Pullham, Southernshire, upon the charge of bigamy; and all the world—which for once meant really a considerable number of persons—are looking forward with interest to what will further come of it.

Imagine the babblement on the matter in fashionable and even select circles; the airy talk

in club smoking-rooms of the "grief" that "poor beggar Landon" is like to come to; the "sensation" among the semi-Bohemians, to whom the injured wife—that is, the first one—was known, even better than the husband; and the scandal generally that ran from lip to ear like fire, among the gossips of the town. The public interest in the affair was undeniable, and, unhappily, there were some persons for whose feelings the word interest was very inadequate indeed.

For example, on the very morning that the intelligence was blazed abroad in the London newspapers—within a few hours, that is, after the event had happened—Mr. Landon the elder arrived in haste at the house in Curzon Street. He was met at the threshold, greatly to his surprise, for the ways of society were not familiar to him, by a prompt "Not at home."

"Great heavens!" cried he, "your mistress has gone off then at once to Southernshire?"

The reply to this was not included in the footman's orders.

"I think not, sir," was all he could venture upon, and even in that he hesitated.

"For Heaven's sake, man, tell me where she is gone?" exclaimed the father in his agony.

Before the servant could answer, the dining-room door opened, and out came Gracie, white as

a spirit. "Come in here, Mr. Landon," said she; and she took his trembling hand, and led him into the empty room.

"Where is Ella? What is the meaning of it—of this horrible lie," he broke out. "It must be contradicted instantly. My boy will be ruined."

"Alas, sir, the news is true!"

"What, that he has committed bigamy? Bigamy! Do you know, girl, that men are sentenced to penal servitude for bigamy?"

"Dear Mr. Landon, I pity you from the bottom of my heart. I could not bear to hear you sent away from this house; but I can do nothing for you."

"Yes, you can; you can give me help. Ella is your friend—my boy was your friend. I am his father. Help us!"

Gracie saw at once that he believed all. He was not a man to ask for aid of anyone, save in the direst straits. His appealing face—a face which that morning's news had already "aged" by at least ten years—was terrible to look upon.

"Alas, Mr. Landon, I have nothing to give you but my prayers. Ella is implacable, and I must needs say that she has been most sorely tried."

"But bigamy!" put in the wretched old man

with a bitter cry. "She cannot know how grave a crime it is, and the punishment of it. A prison—hard labour—the hulks! My boy! my boy!"

The tears streamed down his wrinkled face, and drew down Gracie's with them.

"Then you are sorry for him," he exclaimed, "though you are not his wife? She must needs be sorry too? Let me see her! I am his father! I will go down on my knees to ask her pardon for him! I was always fond of her; she knows it. I am an old and broken man. She will have mercy upon us! Let me see Ella!"

"She will not see you, sir, I am very certain," returned Gracie. "She will be very angry even that I have seen you. The chain is broken between herself and your son, and all the links are gone together. My heart bleeds for you, sir; but I must needs say, in her behalf, that it was not she who broke that chain, nor even led to its breaking."

"I know it, girl! I confess it! I will acknowledge it in her presence. He has behaved infamously—basely! I have been to Doctors' Commons, and I find he got the special license for his second marriage on the very day he last left his home. He has deceived me—his father—all along. He has had chambers in Brant

Street, and pretended to carry on business there, to deceive this other woman as to his identity. I found out all that before I came here this morning. Do you suppose it costs me nothing to confess it, girl? and I will confess it to her this moment! I will say to Ella, 'This man, who is my son—my boy—is a scoundrel!' But I will add, 'Yet he is your husband; you loved him once, dearly—dearly—as dearly—almost—as I love him still! and you will not send him, you—his wife—you will not send your husband and my son—to gaol!'"

It was, beyond measure, pitiful and pathetic to hear the poor old man.

"I will go—Mr. Landon—I will go to her," sobbed Gracie; "but, I tell you beforehand, it will be useless."

"Go, girl, go!" cried he, with tremulous anxiety. "Let me see her, for five minutes—or only for one minute—and I will bless you to the last wretched moment I have to live."

Gracie went upstairs at once; past the disused drawing-room to her friend's own chamber, in which Ella now passed half her days, pacing it from end to end, like a caged animal, and thinking her bitter thoughts alone. To Gracie she was always gentle; but to the rest of the world her tone and manner had altered strangely.

"Well, darling, what is it?" said she, staying her quick steps, and forcing a transitory smile.

"Old Mr. Landon has come, Ella——"

"Then let him be sent away," interrupted she, impatiently. "I thought I had given orders to that effect."

"Yes, dear; and it is I who have ventured to disobey them. I heard him in the hall asking for you so pitifully, that I went out; and, oh! dear Ella, he is so shocked—so agonised! If you would only grant him speech with you, were it but for five minutes——"

"What for?"

"He wishes to acknowledge his son's errors; nay, his crime."

"Then let him go to Mr. Vance, and prove it. The shorter work that is made with the man, the better. Let him be put away out of sight in gaol, and be forgotten."

"Oh, Ella!"

"Yes, tell him that. Or, if he wants it from my lips, let him come up here and hear it. Only let us have no pleading—except the lawyer's."

Her bitter tone was shocking to listen to, her cruel smile was terrible to behold.

"Yet, this old man was always good to you, Ella, and loved you like his own daughter."

"Loved me! And did not I love his son? Tell him that that love is changed to hate; that, if word of mine could save him from the gallows, I would not speak it, so help me Heaven!"

She had resumed her walk again, and also a certain movement of the lips—a sort of dumb babble, such as is used by the insane—inexpressibly distressing to witness. Gracie saw that her appeal was not only hopeless, but did harm; so silently withdrew, and returned to the dining-room.

"Ella cannot see you, Mr. Landon."

"You mean she will not," answered the old man, the fire of wrath flashing from beneath his shaggy eyebrows. "She has hardened her heart against my boy. She thinks, perhaps, that no worse can happen to her; but may God, who punishes the unmerciful, smite her still more sorely——"

"For shame, Mr. Landon, for shame!" cried Gracie, vehemently. "If you could see her, as I have seen her, you would not use such words; she has been smitten sore enough. She cannot see you, because she is not mistress of herself."

"What, is she going mad?"

"Indeed, sir, I almost fear it."

"What is the use of that, girl, to my boy?" answered the old man, fiercely. "Let her die,

since she will not help him otherwise, and help him that way; let her die, I say."

He had risen from his chair and made his way into the hall, while he was speaking those last terrible words, "Let her die—let her die."

Gracie felt with a shudder that it would be almost better for poor Ella if she did die; better, most certainly, than the fate she feared for her, that she should lose her reason. And better even, perhaps, than to live on, with the power to think, with her husband doomed to a prison by the very lips that had once called him her own. For Gracie was confident that such would be the end of the matter. She felt that the old man who had just left her would never have made that passionate, fruitless appeal to his daughter-in-law's mercy, if he had not known that in it lay his son's only hope.

And indeed, so it was. Mr. Landon, senior, had found out for himself, within those few hours that lay between his receiving the startling news of Cecil's committal and his visit to Curzon Street, all that could be found out respecting the second marriage. He had gone, as he had said, to Doctors' Commons, and obtained the date of the license, and even discovered in his file of *The Times* the announcement of the marriage of Henry Landon, of Brant Street,

to Rose Mytton, of Grantham, on which his eye had once fallen before without a thought of its dread significance but with some shadow of interest, because he had heretofore thought that his name had stood alone in town among men of business. He had heard, indeed, by this time, of some deception having been practised at the time of the first marriage, with respect to his daughter-in-law's maiden name; but only in a vague way. He had no conception that Cecil had relied upon it to save him from the consequences of his second union, or that it would now be used as a legal plea in his defence.

Gracie, on the other hand, knew that it would be so used, and that it would fail. So Mr. Vance had assured her, in the most positive terms; and his opinion had been already backed by that of one of the first counsel at common law, Mr. Pawson, Q.C., who, by the attorney's advice, had been specially retained for the prosecution.

The other side might "abuse the plaintiff's attorney" or even Ella herself, who, he foresaw, would be subjected to a long and harassing cross-examination—"they will turn the Juxon family and their pretty tempers inside out, sir," was his private remark to Mr. Vance; but the

inevitable result would be, he was ready to take his oath, nay, even stake his professional reputation, that the accused would be found "Guilty," and that by no means under extenuating circumstances. "He will have seven years of it, sir, as sure as his name is Cecil Landon."

There was no more pleasant companion for poor Ella in those bitter days than the eloquent queen's counsel, who, contrary to his usual system, was introduced in person to his fair client, whose beauty was, perhaps, a secret spur to him—though he did not need it, for he was a legal thoroughbred—to redress her wrongs.

If the certainty of revenge could have made her happy, as it did her uncle the Colonel, poor Ella would not have been the wretched woman she was.

The spectacle of her unutterable woe, bright as looked Gracie's future, darkened her present with its shadow. One resolve, which cost her not a little, she made at once—namely, that until the coming trial should be over, though it would not take place for many weeks, she should stay under Ella's roof, and give her what loving help she could.

"But, Gracie, there is another's leave to ask," said Ella, to whom this promised comfort was inexpressibly welcome; "he will not be so blind

to my selfishness, and to his own happiness, remember, as you are, my darling."

"I have written to Hugh, and he has answered as I knew he would," was her quiet reply. "We are both content to wait."

The tears which fell from poor Ella's eyes, when she heard that, were the first she had shed since the tidings of Cecil's infamy; and maybe they saved her reason. So true it is that there is no depth of human sorrow but human sympathy can reach it, and, though it may not console, can soften it.

"I have no husband now," sobbed she, "and alas! no father, but only you, Gracie."

On the subject of any withdrawal from Cecil's prosecution, however, on which Gracie had ventured to touch, she was adamant to her friend as to all others; and, indeed, by this time matters had gone too far for any withdrawal, and must needs take their course.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE RIVAL CAMP.

Although in the camp of Ella and her friend, as we have shown, reigned the completest confidence as to the issue of the coming trial—a certainty that she would be declared his lawful wife, and the other "young person" a "nobody" in the eyes of the law, and much worse than a nobody in that of society; and that Cecil Henry Landon would be shortly a mere felon, with a number attached to him in place of a name, in one of Her Majesty's gaols—this was by no means the view entertained by the opposite party.

The sinews of war, thanks to Mr. Landon, senior, were by no means wanting to them also, and though they had failed by reason of Mr. Vance's promptness in securing the services of Mr. Pawson, the second most famous counsel,

Mr. Redburn, and one said to be even more learned in the law, if of less forensic fire, had been at once retained. How it was possible that two such eminent legal luminaries should take a different view upon even a complicated case, may doubtless to some appear extraordinary, and still more so, when, as in the present instance, the gist of the matter lay, as both agreed, in a nutshell. As, however, the old alchemists tell us that gold is a test which, applied to certain substances, produces a change of colour, so does a retaining-fee in these modern days possess something of that magic charm; if it does not turn black to white, it makes it so very light-coloured that it is difficult to discern the difference; and when thus presented under certain aspects to a British jury, they have been known to be persuaded that it *is* white, ay, as new-fallen snow or the white of an egg.

Mr. Redburn did not, indeed, enjoy, as did his rival, the undoubted advantage of being introduced to *his* fair client, as Rose might fairly be termed, since on his advocacy depended very literally her name and fame; but it is just to add that he did not need that incitement. He was a man who loved law for its own sake, and yet with a somewhat illicit love; for he loved even yet more to get the better of the law. To win a

cause by proof and precedent was with him too easy a triumph to give him pleasure, but to win a cause where both proof and precedent were wanting, and to extricate a client from the meshes of the law itself, was what still brought the colour into his sallow cheek and tinged "his trembling ears;" to get his verdict, in the teeth of the judge, from the lips of the jury was, in short, what the vulgar call "nuts" to him.

The Ministry was going out, and he was spoken of with certainty as the next Solicitor-General, and therefore these delights, he knew, were coming to an end with him; and he loved them all the more in consequence. So he threw himself heart and soul—or with what there was left of both of them—into the present case, the very difficulties of which enhanced its attraction for him. The attorney, curiously enough, was that very Mr. Everett whose acquaintance Cecil had made in the commercial room of the inn at Wellborough, and who had been himself the unconscious cause of the trial; and *he knew it.* He happened to be professionally engaged at the petty sessions at which Cecil was committed for trial, and at once called to mind, not only his acquaintance of "The Eagle," but the conversation which he had had with him concerning the law of divorce.

To this gentleman Mr. Welby had naturally applied on that occasion for legal advice as to bail, &c., and the case had been afterwards placed generally in his hands. He never spoke to Cecil of his having met with him on a previous occasion, and Cecil exercised the same wise discretion. In fact, the reticence in the camp of the accused afforded a very marked contrast to the openness displayed in that of the prosecution. Mr. Redburn had, indeed, a single interview with Landon; but the questions he put were few, and, as his client thought, and even observed, of an irrelevant nature. "The case will turn upon a point of law," said Mr. Redburn, with an involuntary rubbing of the palm of his hands, "a very pretty point indeed; and our side, at least, will not trouble you with many questions."

But he thought to himself: "If Pawson doesn't turn this fellow inside out I'm a Dutchman; and I'm afraid the heart will be found in a very morbid condition."

Rose positively declined to see either Mr. Everett or Mr. Redburn; she felt as though it would seem like the confession of a doubt of Cecil's innocence, and she had no doubt; she was well convinced that the crime laid to his charge was merely the last vindictive effort of an abandoned woman. But the poor girl suffered tortures

for all that. She knew—for the knowledge could not be kept from her, unless they had shut her up in her own room, and denied her newspapers—that this unhappy case was the talk, not only of the village wherein she had hitherto dwelt retired as "a violet by a mossy stone, half hidden from the eye," but of the whole county; that Helen's face was worn and haggard, beneath the loving smile it still put on; that there would be very literally no more "peace and quietness" for either of them; and that a dreadful day was drawing nigh, when her beloved Henry would have to appear a prisoner in the dock, to be tried on a shameful charge, which, although groundless, must needs leave a shameful stain upon him. Of the danger to her own fair fame she did not think at all; partly because she felt so sure that that, at least, was beyond the reach of evil, and partly because her thoughts were monopolised by her husband's trouble, though actual apprehensions upon his account, as we have said, she had none.

The vicar, too, entertained little or no fears as to the result of the trial. He had been subjected to a pretty stiff examination by Mr. Everett as to what he knew about Cecil's position; and the effect of what he had to tell upon the lawyer had seemed to him to be satisfactory.

Indeed Mr. Everett had said to him, in so many words: "We shall get Mr. Landon off," though, adding that it was "a very unpleasant business."

"Unpleasant!" echoed the vicar, indignantly. "It is the most abominable business that it is possible to conceive. I call it not a prosecution, but a persecution, and of one of the most pure and innocent creatures on the earth's surface."

"Oh dear me," said the attorney, "you're all wrong there. Friendship blinds you, my good sir; our friend is a *very* queer lot."

"Tush, sir! do you suppose I was speaking of Mr. Landon? I am thinking of his wife."

"Just so, just so; you mean his second wife, of course. Well, she has been hardly used, and is much to be pitied; but there, when we have got him off, she will be all right again in a few months. Folks will have forgotten all about it, or somebody else will give them something else to talk about. A really good murder down Pullham way, for example, would set us all quite straight again."

This recipe, even could it have been applied, would probably not have given much comfort to the vicar; but the attorney's assurance that the second marriage would be held valid was of course consoling to him. It was to his credit that for once Rose had his deepest sympathy, notwith-

standing the spectacle of Helen's distress of mind, which pierced his heart to the core; it had also the mechanical effect of making his fingers double into fists, and his right toe tingle whenever he met Cecil. He would have liked to kick him into the next parish; only, like the villain in the melodrama, he was obliged to say to himself, "I must dissemble." In this respect poor Helen had to play the villain, or rather the hypocrite, to a much greater extent. Perhaps she had never shown her love for Rose more strongly than in the efforts she now made to be civil to her husband—to conceal from her sister that she considered him an utter scoundrel. Her contempt for him amounted to loathing, and it sickened her very soul to think that the very best that could be hoped to come out of all this trouble was that Rose should be mated with such a man for life. And, curiously enough, Helen scarcely dared to hope for this best. She alone, of all the Grantham camp, believed that the verdict would be given against Cecil. Of the legal question she, of course, knew nothing; but her woman's prejudice against the man was such that she had already pronounced him "Guilty." And if "Guilty," what would become of Rose?

One may imagine, therefore, what a difficult task was Helen's, to feign regard for the accused

and confidence in his acquittal, and hope for her sister's future, when she had no regard, no confidence, and no hope. Sometimes this period of suspense appeared almost intolerable; the rolling of the heavy hours over her head was a slow torture; and sometimes what was to come seemed still more dreadful, and then they flew with pitiless speed. The sole thing which gave her comfort —and that it did so proved the depth of her distress—was that, as the time fixed for the trial drew near, Rose fell ill. Perhaps her mental suffering had been greater of late than it had appeared to be, and her body now paid the penalty; but, at all events, she had contracted a sort of low fever, which, although not dangerous in itself, quite prostrated her, and would certainly prevent her from appearing in court.

This was a great relief to Helen, though, singularly enough, not to Rose herself. She was eager to give her evidence, thinking doubtless that her presence would animate her husband, and convince the world of the love and confidence she reposed in him. The doctor, who was called in at once, however, forbad her moving from her room, and—like the bad and good influences in a fairy tale—the awful powers of the subpœna were rendered null and void by the magic of a medical certificate.

CHAPTER XV.

THE FIRST DAY'S TRIAL.

It is, as we all know, the opinion of modern philosophers and critics that the days of "sensation" are numbered—that human nature has been so moulded and modelled by their benignant and elevating influence that all social catastrophes and "situations" are beginning, at least among educated minds, to be classed with the stories in the "Penny Dreadfuls" as dull and vulgar, and to lose their "morbid interest." The attractions of the stage are waning before those of the meetings of the Royal Society, or those offered by the pages of the "Metaphysical Review;" and everybody is growing scientific and sensible. But at the time at which our story is enacted, human nature was still pretty much in the same state, with regard to its objects of interest, that it had been, say, for the last four

thousand years—to confess the truth, in that respect it gave little signs of mending.

Incredible as it may now appear to us, nothing, for example, interested people in those days so much as a great criminal trial. What Mr. Everett called "a good murder"—and, if he had not been speaking to a clergyman, would perhaps have even called "a jolly good murder" —was wont to excite the benighted public to an extraordinary degree; and next to a murder—next best, I fear, I may almost say, and especially when the parties concerned moved in the upper circles of society—was a trial for bigamy. Even in London, as we have seen, the case of Regina *v.* Cecil Henry Landon was looked forward to with considerable interest; but, in the county where the Pullham assizes were held, it is scarcely too much to say that all society was on the tip-toe of expectation. Delightful as it is, or rather was, to see anybody of the upper classes put in the dock for so serious, and yet gentlemanly, an offence as bigamy, how much greater was the bliss to those among whom the man had lived, and to whom he was more or less of an acquaintance? The price of cattle, the prospects of the hunting season, and even the list of stewards for the next county ball, were absolutely "nowhere" as topics of conversation,

compared with the coming trial of Mr. Henry Landon.

Everybody in Grantham received a lift in the social scale—or, at all events, in their conversational attractions—through their local connection with the accused. "Such a gentlemanly man to look at!" "So agreeable!" and, "Only a few months married!" Poor Rose, too, obtained no inconsiderable celebrity by right of her husband. "A sweet pretty creature!" "Dying, they say, from the shame of it!" "Enough to make her poor father" (the late vicar of Grantham) "turn in his grave!" Even Helen did not escape. Her position, too, was "most deplorable;" and "Mr. Welby"—who would have married her on the instant, though Cecil had been sure to be hanged—"would certainly have every excuse for crying off his engagement with her." It was really shameful that a mere medical certificate should have the power to deprive society of seeing the second wife in the witness-box. "All sham, my dear, as I am informed, on the best authority." But still there would be the first wife to look at—"She has 'the beauty of the devil,' I am told"—and that morbid anatomy of Cecil, when he should be turned inside out.

There are some people, we know, who have

had the bad taste, theologically speaking, to pity the "puir deil;" but Christian charity did not go to that extent—in Southernshire, at least—of pitying the poor devil Landon. I am afraid he is beyond the commiseration of my readers also. Yet, when the judges arrived, "a terrible show," and "the sheriff"—he came, too, with all his —well, javelin "crew"—and the tramp of feet, and the blare of trumpets, filled the county town, there was no one on the long black list of "prisoners to be tried" whose heart sank so low within him as Cecil Landon's. It was not because he thought he should be found "Guilty" by the jury, for he firmly believed he should be acquitted. Mr. Everett, with an eye, perhaps, to his bearing in court, had even said, "You are safe enough, Mr. Landon." But, alas! he was already "found guilty" by his own conscience, and by all, save one, he knew, whose opinion was of any value to him. Neither Helen's civil speeches, nor the vicar's assumed calm, had for a moment concealed from him their real feelings towards him; he felt that they despised him from the very bottom of their hearts.

Darall he had refused to see. His father had come down to see him once, but, at his own request, had not repeated his visit; nor when he came would Cecil permit him to see Rose.

The old man's purse had been placed unreservedly at his disposal, but it could not be said that he was heart and soul in his son's cause—his heart and soul were too honest to be at his service; and the story that he would have had to tell to Rose was very different, as Cecil knew, from that which he himself had told her. That he might be acquitted, many, as we have seen, thought probable; but there was but one—whose ear he had abused, and whose love blinded her—who believed that he did not deserve punishment. He knew better than anybody—ay, better than Colonel Gerard Juxon, who did literally thirst for his very blood—how deeply he deserved it. Moreover, which may surely so far be set down to his credit, he felt no anger against the Colonel, nor any of those who were so bitterly pressing the charge against him; and, least of all, did he feel wrath with Ella. Next to Rose, indeed, she had his sincerest pity; and he pitied both of them—though I do not say he did not pity himself—far more than himself; for in his heart of hearts he believed—such is the amazing force of man's conceit—that Ella loved him still.

Imagine him, having surrendered to his bail, standing in the prisoners' dock in the great court-house, filled from roof to floor with spectators whose eyes devoured him. Even the judge him-

self raised his gold-rimmed glasses and surveyed him with a prolonged stare, after which he took a pinch of snuff. It was the first case in the assize list—a true bill having, of course, been returned against him by the grand jury—and everybody in court was fresh and eager. His demeanour was quiet and possessed, though by no means bold. He had the courage to run his eye round that vast assemblage, and to rest it for an instant, though without any sign of recognition, upon those he knew. Mr. Whymper-Hobson—whom his glance arrested in the middle of some humorous remark to a neighbour in the gallery, probably concerning Cecil himself, for he turned scarlet beneath his eye—was in the gallery on his left. His eyes had not fallen on him since he had thrown him, neck and heels, into Virginia Water. In the opposite gallery, a portion of which had been reserved for ladies, was Helen, who had come by Rose's special commandment, under convoy of Mrs. Darall. Cecil noticed, too, that there were many of his London acquaintances, some of whom sought, as some avoided, his eye. Others there were whose faces were familiar to him, but whose names, and the places where he had met them, he had forgotten. One, in particular, a tall, white-headed man, with sloping shoulders like a student, returned his passing

glance with a look of intense disfavour. Beside these there were no persons in whom he had any special interest, for the witnesses in the case were, for the present, kept out of court. It was with them, as he was well aware, that his true ordeal lay, and with one among them above all. He looked forward with sickening expectation to the moment when that door at the back of the witness-box should open and admit Ella; he felt his cheeks pale at the very thought of it, and his eyes seek the ground—and he had to wait for it for weary hours.

The counsel for the prosecution opened the case at considerable, and indeed unusual, length. He listened with more or less of attention, but he was chiefly taken up with speculations as to how Ella would look, and especially how she would look at *him*. Upon the whole he hoped, as he expected, that it would be with vindictive severity—any touch of ancient tenderness or pity would, he felt, unman him quite. At times a subdued hum, the inarticulate expression of deep and unfavourable feeling, would compel him to give heed to the counsel's words. Then he heard himself described as a vile and dissolute wretch, making use of a mere informality of the law—which an ignorance only equalled by his villainy had caused him to believe a valid plea—to break

faith with the woman he had married, and to seduce the affections of another on the pretence of being a free man. He did not seem to have known so much of his own life as this lawyer in the wig and gown knew, and was describing with such merciless minuteness. And yet, dark as were the colours in which his picture was drawn, how far short was it of the blackness of the original as it must needs appear to Ella's eyes! And again his thoughts reverted to his former wife.

By the breathless silence, broken by the occasional sob from some easily-moved woman, the counsel must now be talking of Ella—and it was so. He was describing how she had given him her maiden love, had trusted in him, had cleaved to him in spite of his absence and indifference, and of how the news of his heartless treachery had fallen upon her without foreshadowing hint.

"She was not," said the counsel, "blameless in respect to one point of her conduct to be presently referred to; but she was altogether blameless and undeserving of this wrong as regarded him." Then he went on to touch with what seemed tender delicacy, but was, in fact, judicious lightness, on the quarrel between Ella and her father, and the unhappy error into which she had

been led by her excited feelings with respect to her change of name. "An attempt might be made," he said, "by the other side to influence the jury in the prisoner's favour by the fact that his knowledge of the deception had embittered his relations with his wife, and turned his thoughts to getting rid of her. But the jury were men of principle as well as of intelligence, and would look on that matter in its true light. The man was tired of his wife, no doubt; unhappily, many dissolute and profligate persons did get tired of their wives, though scarcely within so short a time as this man; but the true reason of his second marriage was that his licentious nature had been attracted by the charms of another woman. In his own mind there had not existed a shadow of a doubt of his being already legally married; but he had used the informality already alluded to as a salve to his conscience in contracting a new alliance. The second wife, he," the counsel, "had heard would not make her appearance that day in court. She was said to be ill, which was likely enough—or it might be that she was disinclined to give this man the moral support of her presence."

Here Mr. Redburn begged to call the attention of his learned friend to the fact that a medical certificate had been handed in, which

described Mrs. Henry Landon, "as I shall most certainly prove her entitled to be called," incapacitated by illness from attending the court.

"Ah, well; that might be so. Some of the jury might themselves be acquainted with the convenience of medical certificates;" at which remark, since some half-dozen jurymen had been already struck off the list that morning upon that very ground, there was "much laughter."

But, upon the whole, the case for the prosecution was singularly destitute of such streaks of light; it was unmitigatedly stern and hostile, as well as protracted; and with its length—which by no means invariably happens—it seemed also to grow in strength. What puzzled Cecil—to whom, as we have said, his legal advisers had been very reticent—was, that the fact of his having been ignorant of Ella's deception, on which he himself counted for some sympathy, was willingly conceded, and even dwelt upon. Indeed, as he afterwards got to know, it was the chief point relied upon by his enemies *against* him.

This opening speech took up more than half the day; and the effect upon those who heard it was not only unmistakably hostile to the prisoner, but the prisoner himself seemed to feel that the odds, which had been heretofore in his

favour, had suddenly veered round; for the first time he conceived it probable that he would be convicted. A terrible thought indeed, yet not so terrible as what was to come upon the instant. The counsel for the prosecution, having sat down, had risen again and called "Ella Landon."

The door opened, and in she came, dressed handsomely, but in black, and looking like a queen in exile. A hushed murmur of admiration—the involuntary tribute to her beauty and her wrongs—pervaded the assembly; one person only grudged her that act of homage. When Mr. Whymper-Hobson's friend and neighbour, a young man-about-town, broke forth in rapturous eulogy, "By jingo, how could a man have got tired of a woman like that so soon?" he answered, "For my part, I don't think so much of her; and besides, one hasn't seen the other."

Almost everyone in court—including the old man in the corner of the gallery, who, with his hand before his face like one who shields it from the sun, gazed at her, however, through his fingers—had a full view of her; but her own glance was limited to the judge and the counsel opposite. She had informed herself, beforehand, of the arrangements of the court-house, and studiously kept her eyes averted

from the dock. She looked somewhat pale—which in her case enhanced her loveliness—but perfectly self-possessed; her face was sad, but wore an expression of great dignity. While the oath was administered to her, it was observed that the book trembled in her hand a little; but, otherwise, she stood motionless as a statue waiting for the breath of life.

"Your name is Ella Landon?"

"Yes."

Just that simple monosyllable, and yet it seemed to convey in it her full assurance that the name was hers by right, and belonged to no other. In the utterance of that single word, Cecil seemed to hear his doom.

Her examination followed of course the line of the speech for the prosecution, and revealed nothing that is not already known to us; but when Mr. Pawson put the question as to the reason of her adopting a false name, she answered sadly, but firmly, like one making confession of sin:

"My reason for taking my mother's name of Mayne was, because I had had a quarrel with my father; I do not excuse myself in any way for so doing; it was only less wrong and wicked than the quarrel itself."

There was a pause, during which the rapid

pens of the reporters were very distinctly heard, and then Mr. Pawson said :

"There was no material cause, then, why you should have deceived your husband ?"

"None whatever."

"He did not, however, aid and abet you in the deception ?"

"He ? No." She hesitated, as though in doubt of what was meant.

"I mean," said Mr. Pawson, "that you and he did not agree together before marriage to deceive the public by your assumption of this false name ?"

"Most certainly we did not."

To the general ear there was nothing in this reply ; but Cecil noticed that it had an effect upon the gentlemen in wigs and gowns, some of whom looked at one another significantly ; and at the same time the judge himself stole a glance at him over his spectacles, which had the same effect upon his marrow as the smell of pills, unsilvered. The next time that he should look at him like that, he felt, would be to say, "Prisoner at the bar, you have been found guilty of the crime laid to your charge." In spite of all his efforts to keep calm, he shuddered from head to foot, and his eyes sought the little ledge before him, on which, in old times, sweet herbs were wont to

be placed, to mitigate gaol fever. At the same moment, though he knew it not, Ella looked round and, for the first time, fixed her eyes on him. It was but for an instant, yet those about her noticed that she turned deadly pale.

"The witness has been a long time before the court," remarked the judge, who had observed her pallor. "When you have finished you cross-examination-in-chief, Mr. Pawson, it may be as well to adjourn."

"For my part, my lord, I have no more questions to ask Mrs. Landon," returned the counsel, in a tone of confidence that verged on triumph.

"Then your cross-examination, Mr. Redburn, since it is getting late, and the witness appears somewhat tired, had better be deferred till to-morrow morning."

"Very good, my lord."

Whereupon the court adjourned.

CHAPTER XVI.

FRIENDS IN COUNCIL.

THAT one story is always good until we have heard the other side, is a fact known even to country justices; but by those who are acquainted with legal matters, a shrewd guess can be generally made as to how a case will "go," even from a partial hearing.

And amongst the men of law then assembled at Pullham, there was very little doubt indeed, on the conclusion of that first day's assize, as to how it would fare with Henry Cecil Landon. "He is a gone coon," was the remark made by the leader of the circuit behind his hand to Mr. Pawson, as that gentleman sat down; and Mr. Pawson nodded an "I believe you."

Mr. Redburn, although at that very moment occupied with his "Very good, my lord," had observed the nod of his learned brother, and

knew very well what it meant. A little contemptuous smile played upon his lips, as much as to say: "The nut might be hard for you to crack; but for me it will be 'no more *difficile* than for a blackbird 'tis to whistle'; " but to those who knew him best this show of confidence went for nothing.

"My client is safe, I reckon," whispered Mr. Vance, stopping his leading counsel on his way to the robing-room.

"Unless something quite unforeseen should occur," said the other, decisively; "all is over but shouting."

This intelligence, wrapped up, however, in less sportive phraseology, Mr. Vance thought it only kind to convey to Ella, who had at once retired from the court to the inn, where (not without difficulty at that busy time) the Colonel had secured apartments for herself and Gracie. When the attorney called, the ladies were not in their sitting-room, but presently Gracie entered, and stopped his apologies for calling at so late an hour by the news that Ella had been upon the point of sending for him. "She desires to have a few words in private with you, Mr. Vance."

"I have half an hour at her service," replied the attorney, pulling out his watch, and calculating his leisure with a margin (for he had

arrived at a time of life when man can neither hasten nor adjourn his dinner with impunity). "The day's work of a lawyer is never over in assize time, my dear young lady."

"Mrs. Landon will be here immediately;" and indeed, while Gracie was yet speaking, Ella entered the room, looking very grave and pale. The attorney noticed, for the first time, that she had been weeping; no wonder, he thought, that she had broken down at last. It was necessary, however, to keep up her courage for the morrow.

"Let me congratulate you, my dear Mrs. Landon, upon your admirable bearing," said he, "throughout the ordeal of to-day."

Ella smiled faintly, and sat down, giving a sign to Gracie that she should leave the room.

"No doubt you feel exhausted. It will be a satisfaction to you, however, to learn that you have not spent your strength in vain. Mr. Pawson has just assured me that—humanly speaking—the case is over; that your name and fame will be established beyond question, and—and the guilty punished."

"It is certain then that the prisoner will be convicted?"

"Undoubtedly."

"And his sentence?"

"That will depend upon the discretion of the

judge; it is a bad case; a very heartless and cruel case; not less than seven years' penal servitude I should say; perhaps ten."

There was a long pause, and then Ella asked: "How is it, Mr. Vance, that you are so much more certain of this result to-day than you were yesterday?"

"We felt confident yesterday, my dear madam; but the main fact on which the prosecution rests has now been proved, namely, that Mr. Landon was at the time of your marriage ignorant of your having adopted a—well, a *nom de cœur*—a pseudonym. If he had known it, it would have been a conspiracy to deceive the public, and the marriage would have been invalid. Mr. Redburn's efforts will probably be devoted to-morrow to shake your testimony upon that point; to establish, that is, a previous knowledge on your husband's part. We know that the fact is on our side; but I would impress upon you to be very careful in your replies; the least admission in the hands of a man like Redburn might be used with fatal effect."

"The prisoner might escape, you think?"

"Certainly; and if he did, your reputation would be compromised, nay, sacrificed. If Mr. Landon has not committed bigamy, you were never his lawful wife; there is no alternative; it

is a duel *à l'outrance*, and as they used to say when such were fought, 'May God defend the right,' we ask no more of Him." And the attorney, mindful of his dinner, rose to go.

"You have been very good and kind to me, Mr. Vance, throughout this painful business," said Ella, as she took his hand. "You have done everything in my cause, I believe, that man can do."

"I hope so, madam; but we will talk of that to-morrow, when we have reaped the fruits of it."

"You once mentioned the name of the attorney upon the other side; Mr. Everett, I believe?"

"Yes, a country lawyer, but one who must have his wits about him to have secured Mr. Redburn for his counsel. He is lodging at the 'White Lion,' with his cloud of witnesses, and I understand—by-the-bye, where is our friend the Colonel?"

"He is dining below in the coffee-room, as Gracie and I have not much appetite for anything beyond tea and toast."

"Ay, ay, but you must keep up, my dear madam; you will need support to-morrow, I assure you."

"That is true," said Ella, gravely. "Good-bye, Mr. Vance."

"Good evening, my dear madam, good evening;" and the lawyer wondered to himself, as he went home, why Mrs. Landon had been so eager about the points of law (in which she had hitherto evinced no interest), and why she had sent Miss Ray away, as though her intention had been some private matter. But women were so fond of a mystery, that they would affect one even when there was none at all.

At the "White Lion," not a hundred yards from Ella's inn, and on the same side of the street, Mr. Everett, as we have heard, was lodging, and under the same roof were also Mrs. Darall (her son had, under the circumstances, deemed it right to remain at home, though he knew Gracie would be at Pullham), Helen, and the Rev. Samuel Welby. Helen had sent a message to the attorney immediately after the court rose, and he at once repaired to the sitting-room common to herself and the little party from Grantham, whom he found all assembled there. Gloom sat upon them, except the vicar, who being a witness had not been in court, and therefore was unaware of the general feeling produced there by the opening speech of Mr. Pawson, and by the examination of Ella.

"Come, Mr. Everett, we want you to cheer us up a bit," said he, gaily. "These good people

think, because they have heard what one side has to say, they have heard all;" and he looked with tender reproach at Helen, who was very grave and pale.

"Well, I hope our side will have something to say to-morrow, sir," answered the lawyer, nodding his head in what he meant to be a significant and encouraging manner, but which somehow fell short of his intention; he seemed to be rather "hanging his head."

"There are some very unpleasant things said, I understand," observed the vicar; "but then again, as I was telling Miss Helen, the man was paid to say very unpleasant things."

"No doubt, sir; and I am bound to say he earned his money. Hard words, however, break no bones. What we have to hope for—and the vicar has to pray for" (Mr. Everett was very much "at his ease in Zion")—"is that the lady may break down under cross-examination."

"So far as I could gather from what was said to-day," observed Mrs. Darall, "I understand the case will turn upon Mr. Landon's knowledge of the deception before or after marriage."

"Oh! then *I* can settle that," exclaimed the vicar, cheerfully, "if at least the accused's own words can be taken as evidence, for he told me

himself, that when he married he had no doubt that the ceremony was legal, and that he never heard of his wife having passed under a false name till——"

Here he stopped, for over Helen's face, on which his eyes were fixed, a deadly pallor was creeping, which grew and grew until he was compelled to associate it with his own words. He looked up inquiringly at the lawyer, who burst out into a forced laugh.

"Never *volunteer* information, my dear Mr. Vicar," said he, "even to your own side. Your counsel knows, or ought to know, what is best for you to say, and especially what is best for you not to say. And as for the other side, it is fortunately highly improbable that they will think of asking one what Mr. Landon has stated to you about his first marriage."

"It is true, however," observed Helen, gravely; "he has told me himself just what he told Mr. Welby."

"Yes; but you are not a witness in the case at all, Miss Mytton," remarked the lawyer.

"This is very horrible," sighed Mr. Welby, who had become aware that his little piece of knowledge was a great deal worse than useless, and that if he told all he knew it might even

decide the case against the prisoner; "it is absolutely shocking to think that, even if the verdict is in favour of this unhappy man——"

"Then don't think," interrupted the attorney, sharply. "No one has a right to think, or at least to express an opinion, upon this matter, except the twelve gentlemen whom you will see to-morrow in the box."

"Mr. Everett," said Helen suddenly, and with great earnestness, "I do not wish to ask you any questions that may be contrary to custom or legal etiquette, but I beg of you to tell me this much: I am quite sure that the confidence with which you spoke of this sad case this morning has been somewhat shaken; I desire to hear from your own mouth, do you now think it possible—nay probable—that Mr. Landon may be found guilty?"

"My dear madam, the law is a game of surprises; there is really no telling, nor even guessing——"

"I understand," interrupted Helen, gravely; "you need say no more. I shall start to-night for Grantham to prepare my poor sister for the worst."

A sudden silence then fell upon them all—a silence that indeed gave consent. It was the opinion of everyone in the room that things

were going very ill, and that Rose should at least be given to understand that there was danger.

The attorney was the first to speak.

"I by no means wish to dissuade you from so prudent a course, madam; but it is my maxim always to have counsel's opinion, where it is possible, before taking any important steps. Half an hour can make no difference one way or another, and I will just sound Mr. Redburn. —What is it, my good man?"

This to the waiter who had entered the room, and was addressing the attorney in a low voice.

"A widow lady you say? Oh, very good. No doubt about that ejectment case at Swallingford, confound her. Well, I'll pack her off in five minutes, and then see Mr. Redburn."

Whereupon the attorney bustled off.

In spite of his quick ways and cheerful talk, everyone present was cognisant that the attorney had lost confidence in the result of the trial. Poor Mrs. Darall, who scarcely knew which side to pray for, but whom an overmastering curiosity had induced to offer to chaperon Helen to the assize, was having a good cry behind her spectacles. As for Helen, the apprehensions she had all along entertained regarding the matter were now more than confirmed. She was already thinking of the consequences that must needs

flow from her brother-in-law's conviction—that is, when he should have been proved to be no brother-in-law; and they appalled her. For all her fears, she had hitherto ventured to hope that so pure and innocent a creature as her sister would be preserved from such unlooked-for sorrows, and such undreamt-of shame, as must fall to her lot if Landon's first marriage was held valid. The vicar, who was still in that first stage of the matter, when "the worst" seems too dreadful a thing to happen, and moved by the wretchedness of her face, strove to give her a crumb of comfort.

"I cannot—I will not believe, dear Miss Helen," whispered he, gravely, "that Heaven will permit your sweet blameless sister to be wronged."

"That is just what the friends of this man's first wife are saying, Mr. Welby," was the unexpected rejoinder, given in those quiet tones beneath which bitterness lies so deep. "One of the two must be wronged. Why should it not be Rose?"

"Nay, the cases are surely not parallel. There was no deception on Rose's part."

"Or, rather say, she deceived herself, poor darling, instead of him," returned Helen, sadly. "No, Mr. Welby, the true deceiver has been her husband. Every word that woman spoke in

court to-day was true, and next to Rose it is she whom I pity most. Nay, when this verdict shall have been given, next to the woman who has lost name and fame by it, I shall pity her who has won the cause."

"You were always just, Helen," answered the vicar, gravely, "no matter at what sacrifice. But the difference between those two of whom you speak, when this case shall have been decided, is greater than can be described in words; if you are sorry for the one, your compassion for the other should be deep indeed."

"I know it, Mr. Welby; and it *is* deep—nay, infinite; for my heart misgives me that she who will have to bear the heavier burden is the weaker, and will perish beneath the load."

To this the vicar made no reply—indeed it would have been cruelty to speak on the matter with Helen further—but went out and bespoke the vehicle that was to take Helen and Mrs. Darall back to Grantham, so soon as Mr. Everett should have come back. They had no expectation of his having anything encouraging to communicate to them, but it might be that in Mr. Redburn's judgment, in which they had great confidence, the return of the two ladies might be premature.

CHAPTER XVII.

ELLA GOES OVER TO THE ENEMY.

An attorney-at-law, though a most important personage in the eyes of "the higher branch of the profession," is, as everybody knows, in the lower, and can be approached by the general public directly, with caution indeed (if they are wise), but without any breach of etiquette. Barristers—for a reason that I will merely venture to hint is best known to themselves—are approachable by clients only through this "middleman" with all the consequences (and more) that generally result from the employment of third persons. So, although it was undoubtedly a liberty for any client, even a widow lady, to intrude upon Mr. Everett's privacy at the "White Lion" on a matter of business, it was not an outrage, as it would have been if she had called upon her counsel. Still, the ejectment case was

a small thing; the widow was a bore, and Mr. Everett thought himself justified in resenting her intrusion.

"My dear madam," he began, so soon as he caught sight of the lady in black, in his dim parlour, where only one gas-jet was alight, "I am sorry to say I have only a few moments to give you, as I have an appointment with Mr. Redburn."

"It is with Mr. Redburn that I wish to speak," was the unexpected reply, given in a voice that was familiar to his ear indeed, but was not that of the widow. "Since you are going to him, I will go with you."

"Good heavens! am I speaking to—to Mrs. Landon?"

It was the essence of his case of course, that Ella was *not* Mrs. Landon; but standing there as she did, so stately, and so still, and above all, with that look of distress and pain on her noble face, he could not refuse her the title. Moreover, her presence was so astounding, that he was put off his guard, and had no time to pick and choose words that should be "without prejudice."

"That is my name, sir; I wish to see Mr. Redburn at once upon a matter of the deepest importance."

"But, my dear madam, if, as I conclude,

your visit has reference to the trial now pending, this is most irregular—you should have sent Mr. Vance to me—though even then, you must surely be aware that the case is not one in which any compromise——"

"I wish to see Mr. Redburn," interrupted Ella, firmly (for she indeed it was); "if it is impossible for you to introduce me, let me know where he lodges, that I may introduce myself."

"Can I not tell him for you—it is the usual course—anything you may have to say——"

"No, I must see him myself, and at once; every moment is precious. Where is he?"

By this time the attorney had recovered himself, and his natural sagacity suggested to him that this lady's clandestine visit to the enemy's camp must bode good, and not evil, to his client's cause. Compromise, he had truly said, was out of the question, but without doubt it still lay in the power of Mrs. Landon No. 1 to give a very different complexion to the case, with the assistance of the opposing counsel, than that it had hitherto worn. Perhaps her heart had relented towards her former husband in his extremity, and sought to mitigate his punishment; or it might be that, womanlike, now she had done him all the mischief possible, she wished some private message of forgiveness to be

conveyed to him, before he was snatched away from the eyes of men ; her purpose, at all events, he was persuaded was not hostile, and so far there could be no objection, save in the way of etiquette, to granting her request.

Upon the whole, and considering the difference of their natures, it was creditable to the attorney's intelligence that he had taken a view of Ella's conduct so approximate to the truth. She had come down to Pullham with the fixed intention of pushing matters against the prisoner to the uttermost. She had flattered herself that her righteous wrath with him would have been as persistent as it was vehement—that her new-born hate was complete enough to cast out all love. She had no consciousness of weakness in this respect, until she had actually appeared in court, when she found herself unequal to look at Cecil face to face. Up to that moment she had actually gloated upon the idea of seeing him stand in the felon's dock, the object of public contumely and of her own withering scorn. Even in his presence she had steeled her heart against him, and certainly showed no softness in her replies to her counsel. But as the feelings of the vast audience became wrought up in her favour, and every word she uttered—each a stab in Cecil's breast—found welcome with them, her

determination began to waver, and "the woman" to assert herself within her. After all, this man was hers, and, like the mother in the judgment of Solomon, she felt that rather than let her beloved one die she could almost leave him to another's arms.

When that crucial question came, to which she had answered "No, most certainly he did not," she felt her reply had sealed his doom; she too had caught the significant glances of the Bar, and that look of the judge that had frozen Cecil's marrow; and, moved by an involuntary impulse, she had turned and looked at him.

Great Heaven, was it possible that that white despairing face, with its cast-down eyes, was the same she had known but two short years ago, so beautiful and bright! The contrast smote her to the core. For an instant—such as that, so fleeting but so limitless, in which it is said the drowning behold their Past—she pictured to herself the lover of her youth, and, bitterest thought of all, confessed how she had compelled his love. How she had laid plans, not snares indeed, but deliberate projects, to win him, without which perchance he would never have been hers. "He shall be mine," she had said, and she had made good her words; and now that she had lost him, she was pressing

him step by step over the precipice of ruin, as though he had vowed himself to her of his own free will. She had had at times the audacity to speculate in her wild way upon the right of Omnipotence itself to doom to future punishment the creatures it has made, and placed in the world on trial without their own will or cognisance; and yet she was soon about to doom this man to a hell on earth (for no less would be the common gaol to such as he), because he had broken the fealty which he had not sought, but which had been imposed upon him. That she felt no humiliation, for the moment at least, at this confession of her secret soul, was proof indeed of her remorse. How much of pity, nay how much of love itself, may have mingled with it, I know not, nor did she herself know; but the resolve that over-mastered all within her, and which never afterwards wavered, was made at once. She would strike that fallen man no more. She had said that his blood would be upon his own head, but that was false; it would be upon her hands, and it should never stain them.

The prisoner should go free.

"If you really wish to see Mr. Redburn upon my client's business, madam," said the attorney, "I will take you to him."

Ella bowed in acquiescence, and Mr. Everett took up his hat at once, and they went out together.

It is, or was, considered derogatory to the dignity of barristers-at-law to dwell at inns during assize time, and Mr. Redburn had lodgings in the High Street. He had dined alone, and sparely as his custom was, and was already at work upon an intricate case which was to be tried in the civil court, perhaps upon the morrow, if the great bigamy trial should be disposed of at a sufficiently early hour; but, in Ella's view, the papers that crowded his table had reference only to that matter. He was doubtless seeking, and seeking in vain, for some loophole of escape for her unhappy husband.

He had risen, of course, on her entrance, and had shown no little astonishment when the attorney had introduced her to him by name; but he had at once recovered himself, and assumed his usual somewhat formal manner.

"Pray be seated, madam," said he, offering her a chair; and then waited for her to speak, still with his pen in hand.

"You are surprised, sir, doubtless, by a visit at such an untimely hour, and, above all, from me. But I have a matter to communicate to

you which is of the utmost importance to one of whose interests you are the guardian."

Mr. Redburn bowed, and smiled a deprecating smile, as though, if it had not been rude to contradict a lady, he would have assured her that nothing was less surprising.

"The matter, too," continued Ella, with a glance at the attorney, "is of a strictly private nature."

"Be so good as to step into this room, Mr. Everett," said Mr. Redburn, opening a door that communicated with a small apartment occupied in the daytime by his clerk.

With the slight protest of a very perceptible shrug of his shoulders, the attorney obeyed. It was collusion no doubt, and quite unprecedented collusion, but Mr. Redburn was a great man, and ought to know best.

"Now, madam, what is your business?"

If she expected to find this gentleman conciliatory and submissive, as behoved a man conscious of a weak cause, and in expectation of defeat, she was mistaken.

"I am come here, Mr. Redburn, on behalf of your client—my husband—Cecil Landon."

"I conclude then at his own request?"

"Not at all. I have not seen him, save in

court, nor have I had any communication with him whatever."

Mr. Redburn bowed again.

"I suppose I may take it for granted, sir, that unless something quite unforeseen should be interposed in his favour, this man will be convicted, and that the law will take its course."

"The law, madam, will, let us hope, be vindicated," answered Mr. Redburn, nursing his knee and speaking very gently; "but as to which direction it may incline, that is a matter for the jury to decide to-morrow."

"You do not understand me, sir. I am come here to gain no advantage over my unhappy husband; but, on the contrary, to give him what help I can. You may say that I have hitherto shown myself to be his adversary; and that is true. It is now my wish to undo the harm that I have done him, so far as in me lies. The point, as I have been informed, on which the case will turn is the foreknowledge of the prisoner as to the deception I practised on him at our marriage."

"That is an important point, madam, no doubt," assented the lawyer.

"If I furnished you with a positive proof of that foreknowledge, could you secure Cecil Landon's acquittal?"

The lawyer scanned her with great intentness before he answered.

"Such a proof as you mention, madam, would, no doubt, in conjunction with other evidence that we have to offer, strengthen his position very considerably."

"Great Heaven!" cried she, clasping her hands, "strengthen it! Then you could not be sure of saving him even were you possessed of such a proof?"

"That is not at all what I meant to convey, madam; I would have rather suggested that my client's case is independent of such aid, though it would doubtless be of great assistance."

Ella drew forth a folded paper from a reticule she carried on her arm, and handed it to the lawyer.

"Be so good as to read that," said she.

It was the statement she had written out at Woolwich concerning her quarrel with her father, and which, but for her uncle's persuasion, she would, as we have seen, have placed in Cecil's hands before their marriage. Though very clearly written, it was of considerable length, and the lawyer read it twice over before making any remark upon its contents.

"This seems to be a sort of explanation, madam," said he at last, with an indifferent air,

"of your family reasons for adopting an assumed name, and shows them to have been much the same as we have heard them stated to-day in court."

"It is more than an explanation, sir; it is a confession, written down for my husband's eyes on the eve of our marriage."

"The date corresponds, I see," said the lawyer, thoughtfully.

"I wrote it at that time, and for the purpose mentioned, sir. It is yours, to make use of it as you think best—I mean best for my husband."

There was a long pause, during which the lawyer sat stroking his smooth-shaven chin and deep in thought.

"Do I understand," said he at last, "that you are not prepared to swear, Mrs. Landon, that your husband did not see this document the day before your marriage?"

"Yes," cried she, eagerly, "that is it. I will not swear that he did not read it on that very morning."

"You wish me to put that question to you in court to-morrow?"

"I do."

"Are you aware of the social consequences that must needs happen to yourself in case of

my client's acquittal?" said Mr. Redburn, after a short pause.

"I am. I know that henceforth I shall have to bear disgrace as well as desertion; that I shall be the scorn of my own sex and the jest of yours."

"Except with those who know you," answered the lawyer, gently. "One man at least there will be who will esteem you as the noblest of women and the most forgiving of wives."

She shook her head forlornly, as one beyond the touch of praise or censure.

"I thank you, sir," said she, sadly. Then in a firmer voice: "You may depend upon me to-morrow, Mr. Redburn. I came to you first, not to put repentance out of my power, for my resolve is fixed, but to avoid useless persuasion. I suppose, however, Mr. Pawson ought to know?"

"If it were a case in which you had only to say, 'I withdraw from the prosecution,'" returned Mr. Redburn, musing, "I should say, tell him, by all means." In his secret heart he thought his opponent ought to be told, but he could not easily relinquish the satisfaction of springing this mine upon the unsuspecting foe and blowing him into the air in the very moment of his fancied triumph. "Your counsel may combat your resolution, you see, my dear madam, and even

refuse to be bound by it. Then, in spite of all your good intentions, he may give us a great deal of trouble."

"Nothing he can say will alter my purpose, Mr. Redburn. This is my own affair, and no one else's."

"Yours is a noble sacrifice," said Mr. Redburn, slowly.

"I don't know as to 'noble,' sir, but it is greater than you think."

"How so, madam?"

"Because if I had gained my cause it would have killed me; and now, alas, I must needs live on." She rose to go, but, as if with a sudden thought (though it had been in her mind for weeks and months) she put this question: "You have seen, I conclude, this lady who is now—Mr. Landon's wife; what is she like?"

"I have never seen her, madam; but Mr. Everett, who has done so, tells me she is very beautiful. Though the cause, of course, of your terrible calamity, she is the innocent cause."

But Ella, with a movement of impatience, had dropped her veil, and was already moving towards the door. She stopped, however, to take the lawyer's extended hand, with a few words of thanks.

"Nay, madam, it is we who should thank

you," said he. "As you have decided to inform your counsel of this matter, had it not better be done through his attorney—by Mr. Everett—in the usual way, and so spare you the pain of further discussion?"

"No, I think not. I know Mr. Pawson well, and will tell him myself." And with that she went out alone.

"I wish she had been my client, instead of the other," was Mr. Redburn's reflection, as he stood with the confession still in his hand. "This is her social death-warrant, poor soul, written and signed by her own hand. What a noble creature, to have been mated with such a cur! She has got rid of him it is true, but what has he not cost her?"

Here there was a gentle knock at the door opening into the clerk's chamber.

"Oh, come in, Mr. Everett, or rather, I should say, come out." So Mr. Everett came out accordingly, and looked about him with a puzzled air.

"The lady is gone," said Mr. Redburn, smiling. "It seems she was afraid to trust herself to your escort. However, you must bear no malice. She has struck her colours, and our client is safe."

"The deuce he is," exclaimed the attorney.

"Then the old proverb ought to be altered, The man that is born to be hanged will never be—sentenced to penal servitude. This will be good news indeed for our friends at the 'White Lion.'"

"Yes; you had better tell them at once, and save Miss Helen another wretched night."

"But I don't know what to tell them," exclaimed the attorney, excitedly; "you have not told *me* how it has all happened."

"To be sure; I had forgotten that. Well, then, you can't reveal it to them, you see; which will save you the embarrassment arising from their curiosity. Just say from me, that the case appears clearer than ever, and that we have no reasonable doubt of to-morrow's verdict. I wish I was as sure about this trespass matter, which will take me half the night."

And the next moment the great counsel had plunged into his quagmire of dates and facts, and was, for all practical purposes, out of hearing.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SACRIFICE.

The excitement among the audience in the assize court the next morning was even greater than it had been upon the previous day; the vast hall was, if possible, more closely packed than before, and presented to the prisoner's eyes, as they wandered over it, an unbroken wall of faces, in which it was difficult to pick out those he knew. There was one face among them, however, which he felt had not been present yesterday, and had guessed the cause of its absence; namely, his father's. The old man had found himself unequal to behold his only son in the prisoners'-dock, even though Mr. Redburn had expressed his confidence that he would pass out of it a free man; yet now, when the odds, as Cecil thought, in common with the vast majority of those around him, had veered round and were

apparently against him, there was his father, not many feet from where he himself stood, sitting next to Mr. Everett. His face had grown grayer and graver of these late months, as well it might, but its expression was, on the whole, less wretched than Cecil had expected; and when it turned towards himself seemed to endeavour to convey encouragement and hope. In the self-same corner of the gallery that he had occupied before, sat the old man whose hostile looks had previously attracted Cecil's attention, and he too seemed of better cheer; but the joy that lit up his eyes as they fixed themselves upon him was of baleful brightness, and he felt that they triumphed in his fall.

Most of the faces that he scanned had a similar satisfaction in them, though not the same malignity. They were pleased to think that a scoundrel who had deserted one woman and deceived another was about to receive his fit reward. Others, again—and this was even a worse omen—regarded him with the pity that tender hearts feel for those in misfortune, even when deserved. In the view of the spectators in general his fate, in short, appeared to be sealed; though their excitement, strange to say, was no whit diminished from that circumstance. Nay, it extended, which it had not hitherto done, to

the rows of gentlemen of the long robe who sat between him and the judge. Nods, whispers, and glances of intelligence were interchanged among them, and in time escaped from those narrow limits and flew all over the court. Something of importance had happened, said the best-informed, which would throw a new light upon the trial; but what it might be was left to the imagination.

Some said that a third wife belonging to the prisoner at the bar had been discovered, whom he had married when he was at school, and would take precedence of all the rest. Others, as accurate in fact as in law, affirmed that the second wife had suddenly died of her malady, and that the prosecution would therefore fall to the ground. Cecil himself only knew that Rumour was busy by the buzzing of her wings.

As soon as the judge took his seat, Ella was summoned into the witness-box, and her appearance was the signal for the profoundest silence. Her face was of ashen paleness; but though the features were firm and composed, it gave the impression, to a close observer, of tension. It was quiet, but from restraint rather than from inward calm. She looked neither to the right hand nor to the left, but straight before her, where the counsel for the defence was stand-

ing, about to commence her cross-examination. Instead of the searching look which that learned gentleman generally used upon such occasions, he wore an expression of mild magnanimity.

"An incident has come to our knowledge, my lud, since yesterday," he began, "which will, I hope, release your ludship and the gentlemen of the jury from the necessity of hearing any further arguments from either side respecting the present unhappy case. Above all things I would wish to spare the present witness any pain and distress of mind (of which she has endured more than enough already) that can by possibility be avoided; so, without preface or question, I will read aloud the following statement written in the witness's own hand on the night but one previous to her marriage, and given to her (supposed) husband probably upon the following morning—the morning, that is, before that ceremony took place. My learned friend upon the other side will not, as I understand, question the authenticity or genuineness of this document, and indeed the witness herself will admit as much.

"'DEAREST CECIL, — Notwithstanding the happiness with which I look forward to our union, and terrible to me as would be the loss of your dear love, I must risk your displeasure—and all

its possible consequences—by a revelation of my true position. I cannot permit myself to call you mine under circumstances, however justifiable in my own mind, which may savour to yours of false pretences. The name under which I have passed for many months, and which I still dare to hope I shall exchange for yours, is not my own—it is my mother's name, but not my father's. There have been family troubles, not indeed of a disgraceful, but still of a most painful kind, which have compelled me to adopt it. My father (whom God preserve) is at enmity with me. I need not here explain the causes that have led to it, for there is nothing in them to which my husband could take exception. It has been the result of ungovernable temper upon the one side, and upon the other—on mine—no doubt of temper also; but yet, I trust, not without circumstances of mitigation. In love and reverence for my father I have not failed, though in filial obedience I have been wanting. I have not hesitated to confess to you that I am myself by nature passionate; I do not think I am impatient of control, but my nature revolts against injustice, and in this case injustice has been done to me. I acknowledge, with all my heart, that I have behaved with disrespect towards my father, the man whom, of all others (save her husband)

a woman is bound to revere and honour. I revere and honour him still, and that I deeply regret the breach between us you may gather from the strenuous efforts I have made—and, I am thankful to reflect, successfully—to heal the differences between you and *your* father. Still, he has cast me off, and even forbad me to wear his name; and I, on my part, have taken him at his word and assumed that of my mother. This I have sworn before Heaven to wear until I have exchanged it for that of my husband, and whatever may be the consequences to me, I shall keep my oath. The matter itself can be of no little consequence to you, but the concealment of it on my part would, I feel, be doing you a great and grievous wrong. Therefore, dearest Cecil, I have herein made confession of my fault, and do pray Heaven that your dear love may prove great and generous enough to overlook it and forgive, always your loving,

"'ELLA.'"

When the reading was finished, the judge beckoned for the document to be handed up to him, which he attentively perused.

"This is your handwriting, madam, is it?" inquired he of Ella.

"Yes, my lord."

"And it was written on the date assigned to it?"

"Yes, my lord."

Then the judge signed to Mr. Redburn to go on.

"I have, I trust, but little more to say, my lud," returned he, with that sideways bow which is one of the graces of the profession.

"You told my learned friend, madam, yesterday, that you and the prisoner at the bar did not conspire together to deceive the public with respect to the pseudonym made use of at your marriage; but you did not, I am sure, intend by that to swear that he had no knowledge of this deception before your marriage?"

"We did not conspire," answered Ella, in a low faint voice.

"Just so; of that I am quite convinced. Your nature, madam, is not one fitted for base conspiracies. But what may have seemed to be of no consequence—or certainly no harm—may, in the eye of the law, be of great weight. The question I have to ask you—and I hope it will be my last—is a different one from that put by my learned friend, and with the reply to which he was so well satisfied; but your answer to my question will be of even greater importance. It will probably decide the fate of the prisoner at

the bar. That he has wronged you deeply, I, for one, will not deny; but you are not here, madam, as your own avenger."

She bowed in silence; her hands grasped the ledge in front of the witness-box convulsively; even ordinary spectators could see that the moment was supreme with her.

"Are you prepared to swear, madam, that this confession, written out by your own hand, was not perused by the prisoner at the bar, before your marriage?"

"I am not."

A murmur of astonishment and compassion ran through the court, and in the midst of it—which immensely heightened the popular excitement—the prisoner burst into tears.

"I submit, my lord, though I cannot place my unhappy client in the witness-box to corroborate this testimony," observed Mr. Redburn, with confidence, "that, proceeding as it does, as it were, from the other side, it is conclusive; that the charge against the prisoner at the bar has failed *in limine*."

The judge looked inquiringly over his spectacles at Mr. Pawson, who rose immediately, omitting however to settle his gown upon his shoulders, without which, as is well known, no examination of a witness can take place.

"I have no opposition to offer, my lud, either to the statement my learned brother has elicited," said he, mechanically, "or to the deduction he has drawn from it."

And he sat down again. The excitement of the audience had risen to the highest degree compatible with silence.

"This piece of evidence has taken the court very much by surprise," observed the judge, doubtfully.

"Not more so, my lord, than it has taken *me*, I do assure you," added Mr. Redburn. "Had I been yesterday aware of the existence of this document—which, however, only came into my hands last night—and of course of the use to which it had been put, I should at once have informed my learned friend, and deprived us all of the great intellectual pleasure of hearing his opening speech."

Here, so closely does comedy tread upon the heels of tragedy, there was a general titter.

"If the counsel for the prosecution has nothing further to say," said the judge, knitting his brows, "it would be wasting the time of the court to prolong the matter. The case is over. Prisoner at the bar, you are discharged."

Then the pent-up excitement of the audience found a vent. The judge, as though conscious

of the necessity of its doing so, had withdrawn himself, and the court-house was at once transformed into a Tower of Babel. Ella had disappeared from the witness-box, and Cecil had made use of the first moment of freedom to make his way from the court-house in the company of Mr. Welby, who had provided a closed carriage for him without, which whirled him off at once to Grantham. Amid the strife of tongues, a loud voice had angrily cried out that the case had been sold, and this of course had added to the universal hubbub. It had not escaped the ears of Mr. Pawson, shouldering his way through the crowd towards the robing-room, but had only called up into his face a contemptuous smile. Feeling his gown pulled in the throng, with evident intention, he turned round, and found himself face to face with an old gentleman, apparently a clergyman of the Church of England, but wearing a very "militant" expression indeed.

"If you are the counsel for the prosecution, sir, you have failed in your duty," whispered he, in a low, fierce voice, "and are a disgrace to your profession."

"You use very strong language, sir," returned Mr. Pawson, quietly.

"I have a right to use it; my name is Juxon, and I am Mrs. Landon's father."

"Then come with me," answered the counsel, seizing him by the arm, and carrying him along with him to the robing-room, whither Mr. Redburn had already preceded him. Beside the two queen's counsel there was fortunately no one else in that sacred place.

"Redburn, here is a gentleman with a grievance, that he has laid to my charge, and from which I must ask you to clear me. He accuses me of having done my client wrong, and you know best that that is not the case."

"But who the deuce is he?" inquired Mr. Redburn, with irritation.

"That is my card, sir—the Rev. Canon Juxon—the father of the woman whose name you have just disgraced."

"Forgive me, sir," answered Mr. Redburn, with emotion; "you have every right to speak; but you are wrong in one thing—you are the father of a lady with whose name disgrace can never be associated. I wish I had dared to say as much in court. She is the noblest and most self-denying of women."

"That is true, indeed, assented Mr. Pawson. "It was your daughter's own hand which placed

that document you heard read to-day in my learned friend's possession; and from her own lips did I myself receive express instructions not to question its genuineness."

Mr. Juxon fell, rather than sank, into a chair, and covered his face with his hands; both the learned counsel were silent for some moments—specially retained by common humanity; then one, Mr. Pawson, began to plead for it.

"If you will permit me, sir, I will take you to your daughter, from whom, as she bitterly feels—though it is through her own fault—you have been too long estranged. Just now, of all times, a reconciliation with you would be a balm to her indeed."

"You advise well, sir," returned the old gentleman, rising quickly to his feet, but speaking with some dignity. "Take me to her—take me to her."

So soon as the judge had pronounced those fateful words, "The prisoner is discharged," Ella had left the court-house and returned with Gracie to her inn. It was only a few steps down the street, but her companion felt with what difficulty she traversed them, and how nearly exhausted nature had succumbed under its load. Yet it was only physical strength that was wanting to her. She kept her spirit up and

her high bearing, till the door had closed between them and the outer world, and she was alone with her friend. Then she threw herself upon her bosom and burst into tears.

"Do not weep, my darling," said Gracie, gravely, "it is not for you to weep, for you have triumphed, Heaven knows it, though man may award the victory to another."

"And he will, Gracie. The finger of scorn will henceforth be pointed at me wherever I go. Do you know who it is that you fold in your arms — a woman without a name and shameful?"

"Yes; I know her well," was the low, soft response, "and never knew her more worthy of respect and love than I know her now. If life seems emptied of its joys to you, it cannot be so long—your reward will come, Ella."

"*My* reward? joy for *me?* No, Gracie. The hardness of my lot is that I am yet so young. I am under the same curse with him of old, who said, 'Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness'—and it will endure. Nay, my case is worse, for my very father——"

There was a knock at the door, and Mr. Pawson entered.

"I am afraid, sir," said Gracie, coming hastily

forward, "that Mrs. Landon is not just now in a condition to see visitors."

"Nay, *I* am well enough, though I am no longer Mrs. Landon," interposed Ella, firmly, her vigour at once returning to her with the occasion. "I am under too many obligations to Mr. Pawson to deny myself to him if he wishes to speak with me."

"I am come on no idle errand, dear madam, believe me," said the lawyer, gravely; "and for my excuse I have brought with me a visitor who will, I am sure, be welcome."

He pointed to the door, where stood Mr. Juxon, with eager eyes and trembling limbs.

"Father!" cried Ella, and rushed into his outstretched arms.

"Yes, yes, my darling; if you have lost a husband, you have regained a father," sobbed the old man. "I was hard and harsh to you, but that is all over now. It will never be so again."

"I was so disobedient and bitter," she murmured. Her tone was penitent but very gentle. Her head was lying on his breast as though it had found a place of rest at last. Gracie and Mr. Pawson had at once withdrawn, and father and daughter were alone together.

"We have been estranged," she went on,

"but never alienated. I have never ceased to love you."

"I know it; I have heard it proved, darling"—he was referring to the document read in court—"it will never more be questioned." He led her to the sofa and sat down; in their new-found happiness they were for the moment oblivious of the present, and unmindful of external things. They did not hear the rapid step upon the stair, nor the quick knock at the door without. "And Gerard, your Uncle Gerard, has stood by you?"

"Oh yes, father; he has done his very best."

"God bless him for it. I was wrong about that money: he shall have it."

"I am not sure," said a rough, sharp voice. The Colonel himself was face to face with the brother he had not seen for many a year. "The law was against me, I confess."

"The law is against *her*, Gerard," said the old man significantly, caressing his daughter with one hand, while he held out the other to his brother.

"That is true, John," said the Colonel, taking it, "and her case is worse than mine was."

"No doubt," assented the Canon, smiling, "though that is not quite the deduction I meant to draw. However, if you will have it so, so be

it; forgive me, then, dear Gerard, as Ella has forgiven the wretch who wronged her."

"I will break every bone in his skin if she will only give me leave," answered the Colonel. "I passed my word at the first start to submit myself to her and the lawyer, or you may depend upon it she should have been avenged long since. Now we have tried the law and failed, it is high time to appeal to a higher tribunal;" and the Colonel pointed to a brand-new horse-whip, which he had laid down beside his hat.

"Uncle Gerard, you pain me by such talk," said Ella, "and I have had enough of pain." Then, seeing how deeply the Colonel was moved by those sad words, she beckoned him to her side: "If my calamity were a little less," continued she, "I could almost have welcomed it, since it has made you and my dear father one again."

"I have behaved devilish badly, John, I own," said the Colonel.

"And I have behaved worse, Gerard, because, being a minister of God's will, I ought to have behaved much better."

Ella slipped from between them, and vanished from the room. It was not fitting for her to be a witness to such confessions of weakness from

such mouths. It was, however, as it happened, an unnecessary precaution, for the conversation at once took another turn.

"Upon my life, John, this damned scoundrel *must* be horsewhipped," said the Colonel. "I have passed *my* word to Ella, but you are still unpledged, and, I am happy to see, look strong and hearty."

"I should like to do it of all things, my dear Gerard, but the fact is they have just made me a Canon, and I am afraid it wouldn't do."

"Why the deuce did they do that?" said the Colonel, with irritation.

"I don't know, I'm sure," returned the other, naïvely; "it puzzled me as much as it does you—— It's a good whip!" he sighed.

"Yes, and between ourselves, it has not been bought altogether to no purpose. As I left the court-house, I found a young gentleman upon the steps, whose face was not altogether unknown to me—though his dearest friends would fail to recognise it by this time. His name, I believe, is Whymper-Hobson. He was explaining to an acquaintance the injurious effect that this acquittal would have upon poor Ella's social position, and seemed to derive great satisfaction from it and his own malice, until I caught him by the collar."

"And you gave him a good thrashing, did you?" inquired the Canon, with excitement.

"My dear John, I thrashed him within *that* of his life," and the Colonel marked out upon his little finger about an eighth of an inch in length. "Thank you, Gerard, thank you——though I am afraid some trouble will come of that. You may depend upon it a fellow of that kind will consult his lawyer."

"He'll consult his doctor first, however, I'll take my oath.—Hush! Here comes Ella. Let us get her off to town at once."

CHAPTER XIX.

EXILE.

It was something, of course—and even a great deal—to Ella, that the catastrophe that had overwhelmed her life (for it did no less) was the cause of reconciliation between her and hers. But her shame was too deep and dark to be relieved by this gleam of joy, and her sorrow too heavy to be borne, though so dear and unlooked-for an ally did his best to share the burden. In England, at least, she felt life to be unendurable, and preparations were made at once to take her to another clime. It was arranged that in a few weeks her father and she were to start for New Zealand, a colony much affected by that High Church divine, and in which, as it happened, he was possessed of house and land. She was unhappy, but thanks to the recovery of her father's love, and doubtless also to the consolation that

always flows from our self-sacrifices, she could not with justice be called wretched. From those who knew her, she had won a rare respect, deeper perhaps than she had ever enjoyed in the days of her prosperity, when the generosity of her soul had remained latent. By the world at large, which knows so little of those it passes judgment on so flippantly, she was ill spoken of. Its lying tongue described her as a designing girl, who had entrapped her lover, as she imagined, into matrimony, and whose conduct when she discovered her mistake had been as unscrupulous as it was vindictive. The fear of a prosecution for perjury had alone wrung from her the admission that had set her husband free; and as for the tenderness with which her character had been treated by the opposing counsel, that was accounted for by her pretty face; though, indeed, added the ladies (for it is their opinion for the most part that I quote), what people saw in her, in the way of beauty, to make so much fuss about, they themselves were at a loss to discover.

The lawful Mrs. Landon (whom, however, they had not seen) was infinitely better looking, and, as they understood, "poor thing," perfectly respectable in every way. How shocking it was to think that she had nearly lost her husband

through a base conspiracy, the members of which comprised, besides this profligate and reckless woman, her father, a clergyman of the Church of England, who had doubtless had his own reasons for disavowing their relationship, and her uncle, a sort of military bully, who had made a personal assault upon a young gentleman of rank and fashion, for expressing an opinion upon the matter—which was shared by all reasonable persons. With the world, however, Ella no longer mixed; so that its views were lost upon her. In only one piece of gaiety—and that of a quiet sort—did she take part, before she left England. Gracie Ray was married to Hugh Darall from her house.

This had been arranged, as we know, under different circumstances, and Ella had written to the bridegroom (for the bride would not so much as listen to her) to point out to him how disadvantageous it would be to them, socially, to adhere to the old programme. "Gracie should come to you," said she, "not only without reproach, but without the shadow of it, and unhappily, the shadow is here." He had written back to say that "his bride's sentiments, as respected the house from which she wished to be married, were also his; and that, of the many reasons for which his respect went hand

in hand with his love for her, this was the chief—that she could call herself Ella's friend, and appreciate to the full the magnanimity of her character." He had addressed her, he added, according to her express wish, as "Mrs. Juxon" (for since the result of the trial she had adopted her maiden name), but he was well aware that it had been within her own power to retain her former name.

So strong indeed were Darall's feelings upon this point, that he would have removed from Grantham, and taken his quarters with his mother elsewhere, so that his future wife might not become associated with those who, of necessity, had been Ella's opponents. At her own earnest desire, however, he had consented to remain at the Wold Cottage.

If his removal would have been a protest in her favour, his remaining in the village was no less so. It soon came to be well understood that, where he was present, the late trial must be, by no means, discussed unreservedly; or, rather, that when the first Mrs. Landon was spoken of, it must needs be with propriety and respect. Strangely enough, however, nothing unpleasant was ever said about her by those who had taken an active part as her antagonists in the late proceedings. Mr. Everett, Mr.

Welby, and Helen were all silent, a circumstance which made association with them, on Darall's part, easier than could have been reasonably expected. And as for Cecil, he, of course, never spoke of Ella, and but rarely of anything else. A physical shock will destroy a man, in mind and matter; anything amiss—be it but the size of a pin's point—in a man's brain will paralyse the strong, or render the wisest a drivelling idiot; but mental troubles (as the materialist delights to show) have seldom the same force.

It is not often that a single disappointment, disgrace, bereavement, what you will, will wholly change a man. Yet thus it was with Cecil Landon. The consciousness of his late narrow escape from social perdition, the knowledge of his ill desert, and, above all, the humiliation of his very soul, caused by the consciousness that he had escaped ruin through the magnanimity of the woman he had loved, had indeed overwhelmed him utterly. Every grain of self-respect had vanished. He avoided society as though he were a leper, for he felt, even when others knew it not, that his presence was contagion. There were some, indeed, that still called him and still believed him to be almost a martyr—that is, a man who has been very

nearly made one. But what satisfaction is it to be thought a martyr, when one knows oneself to be a sneak? Moreover, those more immediately connected with him—Helen and the vicar, for example; nay, even his own father—were also of his own opinion.

He knew that they despised him utterly. His only hope was—which, indeed, came in time to be realised—that their keen contempt would eventually be rounded off to pity.

The one great exception, without which existence would perhaps have been impossible to him, was his wife. Rose believed in him still implicitly, with a credulity which it would have been cruel indeed to have enlightened, and in which, I am glad to say, once for all, she remained throughout her life. She knew that he had been "entangled" by a certain young person, when he was but a boy, and had shown much weakness under great temptation; that a terrible attempt had been made by the same individual to avenge herself upon him, and that—as she, Rose Landon, his lawful wife, had felt quite sure it would—it had signally failed. Her beloved husband had returned to her, purged of his former folly, for which he had been indeed grievously punished, and without stain, save that which he had already confessed to her.

For her part she was very willing to let bygones be bygones, but it was by no means to his discredit that the remembrance of his wrong-doing and its consequences still preyed upon his mind. In time, no doubt, his old brightness would return to him, and in the meanwhile she had no reason to reproach him for lack of love. Cecil's devotion to her was complete, and it is but fair to add that it so continued to be. To the Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society I have always subscribed—my adhesion; and let me do justice to this prisoner, who has been discharged, though it is true not on the ground of innocence. He did not suffer, indeed, as poor Ella did, though his was the transgression, and not hers, but that is the way in which "a difficulty" between the sexes always turns out—arising, probably, from the sin of our first female parent. And that Cecil Landon was not happy even his greatest enemy would have allowed. He gave up all commercial pursuits, with his father's full approval. That speculation of his in the South of England had not turned out favourably; and, besides, the old man had lost all confidence in him. He preferred to go on toiling alone in the old way, rather than to be assisted by a half-hearted partner, who had also deceived him. But he bought his son a farm at Grantham, by way of

occupation for him; and, foreseeing how that would turn out, provided him with an income sufficient for the simple needs of the young couple, as well as for the agricultural deficit.

If Cecil never became a model farmer, he improved, however, in that line; and if he never rose to the dignity of a model husband, he was better than most. Indeed, Rose had no cause to complain of Cecil, whatever charge might have been brought against him by another; and if he had fallen far shorter "of perfection" than he did, she would have forgiven him. The knowledge of a certain something that was to happen would have "clothed him with a dearness not his due," even in that case from the first; it filled her with new love for him, and with gratitude to Heaven, that a child was about to be vouchsafed her to inherit his virtues. Helen was thankful, too, with even a more fervent thankfulness, but upon a very different account. She pictured to herself with a shudder how matters would have been *now* had Cecil been convicted, and thanked Heaven that the coming blessing was not a catastrophe and a curse.

The marriage of Darall and Gracie took place, as we have said, in Ella's house. It was the last use she made of it before she left home, and friends, and country—a self-exiled woman.

It was a very quiet wedding, with but few guests, but the Commissary and his wife were among them. Ella had sent them an invitation without much hope—or fear—that they would accept it; but they did so. It was a matter of general observation that the Acting-Deputy-Assistant-Commissary-General did not wear the same air of conscious dignity that had so become him of yore. He might have been a mere lieutenant to look at him; and even somebody else's lieutenant; which indeed he was. Mrs. Ray No. 2 (*née* De Horsingham) was his captain, or at least his commanding officer.

"How on earth could she have attained her supremacy?" inquired Darall (with the pardonable anxiety of a man who was about to enter the state of matrimony) of Colonel Gerard Juxon.

"My good fellow, it is all through biceps. Look at that woman's arm."

His delight in the fulfilment of his prophecy put the Colonel into the highest spirits, and greatly conduced to the success of the day's proceedings.

But when the Colonel was gone, and the bride and bridegroom, and all the marriage guests, a great gloom fell upon poor Ella, notwithstanding that her father did all he could to cheer her.

"I shall be better, dear father, to-morrow," she said, "and still better the day after; and when we have left England, and are really alone together, I shall be your own dear daughter again, as I was before any shadow came between us. But just now, darling, I must be alone."

So the old man took his hat and left her for an hour or so, to drain her cup of bitterness to the dregs, and then (let us hope) to cast it aside for ever.

She did not envy Gracie her happiness; but the sense of contrast, as she compared her lot in life with her own, was sharp indeed, and it pierced her very soul. It has been cynically said that this or that is worse than a crime—it is a blunder; and to love not wisely but too well is in woman a blunder that is punished far worse than most crimes. As she sat in her darkening drawing-room, thinking over many things, and finding little comfort, word was brought to her that a lady wished to see her.

"I can see no one to-day," was her reply.

But presently it was told her that the lady had come from far, and on a special errand, and that though her name was unknown to her, her business was of importance, and could not be delayed.

"Then let her come up," said she, wearily; and she came up. A thin, pale girl, with a face full of thought and tenderness, and one which she had somewhere seen before, though she knew not where.

"I have come to you, Mrs. Landon," she began, in trembling tones——

"My name is Juxon," interrupted Ella, coldly.

"Not to me, madam, for I know better," was the unexpected response; "you are the lawful wife of Cecil Landon—I am come here to acknowledge it."

"Who *are* you?"

"I am Helen Mytton, Rose Mytton's sister."

"Well?"

"You are about, as I understand, to leave England—banished by your own act; the victim of your own magnanimity; before you go, let one at least of those whom circumstances have arrayed against you acknowledge the greatness of your self-sacrifice."

"I have sacrificed myself neither for your sake nor for that of your sister," was the cold reply.

"I know it, Mrs. Landon. Yet do not forbid us to thank you for it from the bottom of our hearts, but with abasement," and as she spoke

she fell upon her knees at Ella's feet. "You have saved a pure and innocent girl from an inexpiable shame."

"Did she send you to say so?"

"No, madam. Thank Heaven, she knows it not; for if she did the shame would still be hers, as it is mine, let the law say what it will."

"Yet the law shames *me*," said Ella, bitterly.

"No, madam, no; it is powerless to do that: or if it does, it is a shame in which you indeed may glory. As for me, I respect you; I reverence you above all living women. But for you my sister would be—not in your place, no, no, for then she would be enviable indeed, blessed of Heaven, and to be rewarded by it—but dishonoured and defamed; while the child she bears within her—— Oh, what have I done!"

Ella had uttered a sharp, bitter cry and sank back on the sofa, white and lifeless. In a few moments, however, and assisted by such remedies as Helen knew how to apply, she recovered consciousness.

"Did you say that she will have a child?" she murmured.

"Yes, madam; who, but for you, would be branded as the child of sin and shame."

"And you came here to taunt me with it?"

Then Helen perceived her error. Intending to bring balm she had brought wormwood.

"To taunt you, madam, Heaven forbid."

"Then wherefore? To thank me. Do you think I want your thanks?"

"Oh no, madam; though I did come to thank you, I had much more in view."

"What is it then you want of me?"

"Forgiveness. Forgiveness for the innocent, who have yet so deeply wronged you. I could not, I dared not, let you leave England without imploring it—without confessing the victory that is yours, though the world calls it defeat. Dear lady, ere you go, forgive us."

"I forgive you!" said Ella, hoarsely. "I forgive *her!* Go, go," added she, hurriedly, as though she could scarce trust herself not to recall her words.

Helen stopped to print one kiss upon the other's unresponsive lips, and hurried from the room.

"Yes, I forgive them," reiterated Ella, bursting into tears; "I forgive them all—Heaven knows it—but when, oh, when, will it permit me to forget!" She was not thinking of Helen then, nor yet of Rose.

Within the week Ella and her father were on the seas; and in due course arrived at their far-

distant home. Its novelty was to her of incalculable value—there was nothing to suggest the past, nor wherewith to contrast the present; and Time, the healer, did gradually its wholesome work with her. They made new friends, but it was long indeed before they encountered any old ones, and that—so sad their case—was beneficial to them both. In a few years, however, it happened that Darall was ordered to Auckland, and he brought Gracie with him. They had two children left in Mrs. Darall's charge at home, for whom the young mother in secret pined. "Why not send for them and grandmamma, and make your home here?" said Ella; "you are resolute, I know, to accept nothing as a gift from hands however friendly; but my father has purchased land, and wants an honest tenant such as your husband. He has a turn for farming, and the time is favourable. Why should he not leave the army, and live here in comfort, with his boys and girls about him? That no advice could possibly be more selfish, darling, I am well aware, but—confess, is it not good advice?"

"If I could only persuade Hugh," sighed Gracie. For her part, she was well content to be wherever he was, and did not mind the being poor; but there were the children—and many more to come, perhaps—and, even as matters

were, it was very hard to make both ends meet; yet she hesitated about so great a venture. But Ella took Hugh in hand, and, aided by the good Canon, and much unscrupulous assertion of the kind on which angels smile, carried her point, so that the Sapper became a Settler, and delved and built, and, all things running smoothly with him, prospered. To Ella this proved a very Indian summer of happiness, late and unlooked for, but which was also lasting. The two households were separated by no great distance, and in love were one. It was very rarely that the Canon and his daughter were now alone, and when it was so, they were far from unhappy. Ella never could do enough to show her affection for him who had left all and come across the world for her sake; and, thanks to that loving service, it was but seldom that the sense of loss intruded on her. It never showed itself to another—save once. They were alone—she and her father—one winter time, and the old man's eyes failing him at night, she was wont to read to him aloud his favourite old-world books; among them, Dryden. He had chosen the play that contains perhaps the finest scene of passion, betwixt woman and woman, in the whole range of dramatic literature, where the wife of Antony

reproaches Cleopatra as having caused her husband's ruin, and Cleopatra thus defends herself:

> Yet she who loves him best is Cleopatra.
> If you have suffered, I have suffered more.
> You bore the specious title of a wife
> To gild your cause, and draw the pitying world
> To favour it. The world condemns poor me,
> For I have lost my honour, lost my fame,
> And the glory of my loyal house,
> And all to bear the branded name of—mistress.

Ella, poor soul, broke down. The compelling hand of genius shaping a worn theme dug from the forgotten past, had still such power to wring the living heart.

For *she* had lost her honour, lost her fame for one whom (all unlike the Egyptian queen) she had not deserted, but who had deserted her.

That was *what* he had cost her; simply all that a true woman values as her own. It was a bitter moment, and she could not hide its sting; but it passed by, and there were no more of such.

Of what was left to her of life's sunshine she made the most, since she made sunshine for others. She had her father still almost as alert as ever, (though the fire of the Juxon temperament was somewhat fainter), and Gracie for her dearest friend, and Gracie's children—who love her as

well as they may, next to their own mother—in whom to revive her youth. A woman's not unenviable portion—as women's portions go. The consequences of marrying one's first love have been known to be even more disastrous than in her case.

No apprehension of mischance, by-the-bye, would have deterred the Rev. Samuel Welby, if only the Fates and Helen Mytton would have permitted him to try that experiment. She never married him, however, and he remained her faithful but hopeless lover. Nor did this make him unhappy: there are some men who have no objection to the *rôle* of Tantalus in love, and the vicar was one of them. They never quarrelled like real lovers, and had only one topic of disagreement. When he would extol her virtues, calling her the guardian angel of her sister's happiness—as indeed she had been, keeping the bitter truth, or those who would have told it, from her tender ears with flaming sword—she would answer, "Tush: her true guardian angel is on the other side of the globe."

"But my dear Miss Helen, you would surely not compare yourself with that—ahem—exceedingly emotional young person?"

"Certainly not, Mr. Welby; it would be a piece of conceit beyond my powers of assurance.

You are good enough to say sometimes that I am 'one in a thousand;' without questioning your figures, though I have great doubts of them, I may certainly say, that if it be so, the woman you speak of is one in a million."

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